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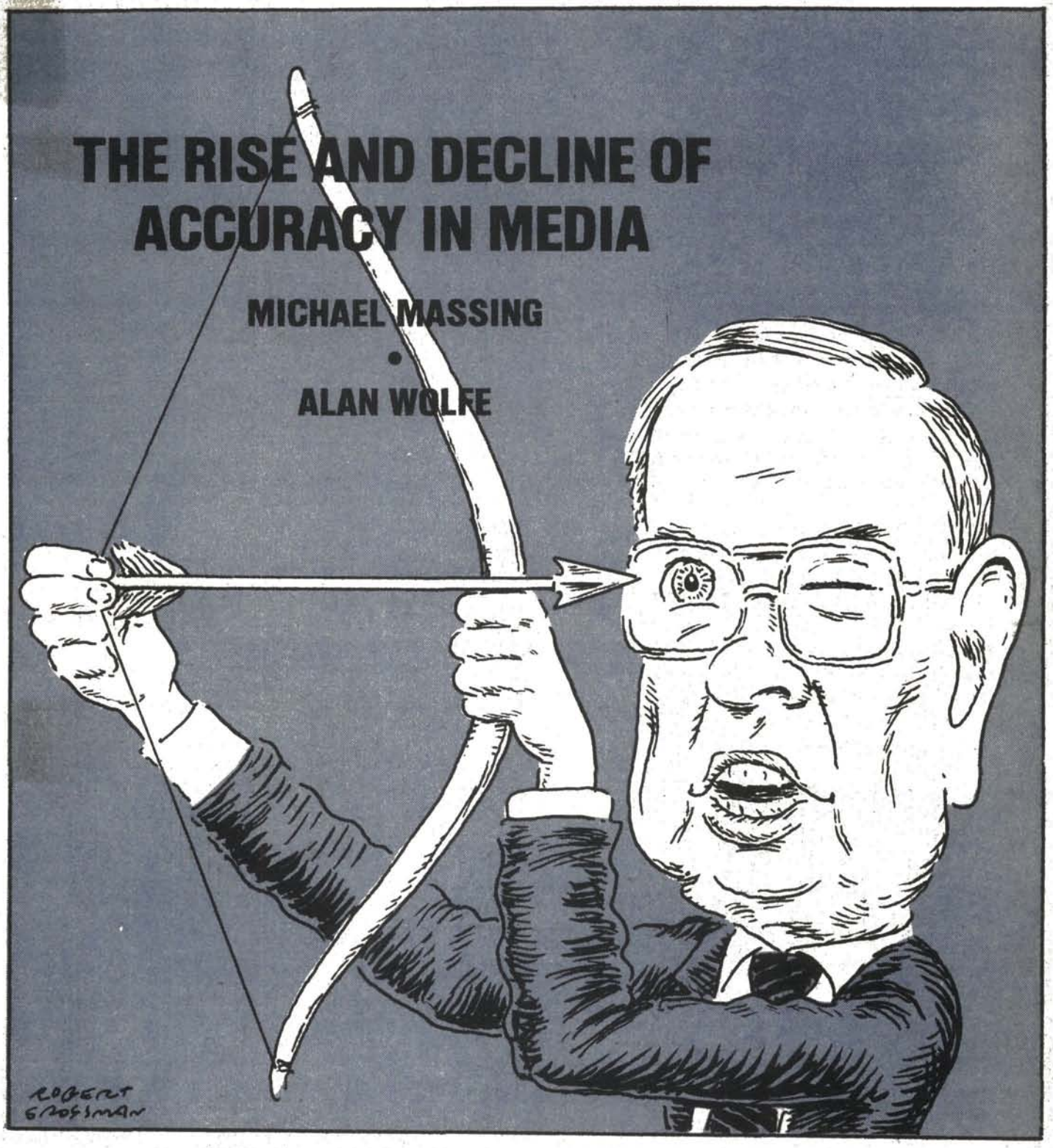

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LETTERS.

A PROBLEM OF FREEDOM

Cambridge, Mass.

Anson Rabinbach writes that I "take seriously" Robert Faurisson ["Films," March 15]. That is false, as he tacitly concedes by his evasion in responding to refutations in the "Letters" column for May 17, where he shifts to new falsehoods: that "the point of the entire controversy" is that I have gone beyond defending freedom of speech by "[attesting] to the integrity of Faurisson's motives." First, that issue did not even arise, to my knowledge, in the controversy in Europe that I reviewed in the *Nation* article to which he refers ["His Right to Say It," Feb. 28, 1981]; rather, it was concocted later in the course of increasingly dishonest efforts to conceal the real issue. Second, I never "attested to the integrity of Faurisson's motives," nor could I possibly have done so, because, as I repeatedly explained, I know little about his work. In commenting on the integrity of those who raised charges against him, I referred in *The Nation* to his praise for those who "fought courageously against Nazism" in "the right cause" and for the "heroic insurrection of the Warsaw ghetto," noting that this "is irrelevant to the civil-liberties issue" and repeating that I was not familiar with his work or interested in it.

To support his false claims, Rabinbach cites a statement that he says appears in the *Nation* article. It does not. Rather, Rabinbach has misquoted the final paragraph of my "Elementary Remarks on the Right of Freedom of Expression," written in October 1980 and added as an "opinion" to a *Mémoire* in which Faurisson defended himself against the charge of "falsification of history," for which he was tried and subsequently convicted.

In that passage I wrote that "even if Faurisson were to be a rabid anti-Semite and fanatic pro-Nazi [as claimed in personal correspondence, no such charges then having been made publicly, to my knowledge] this would have no bearing whatsoever on the defense of his civil rights." I then asked whether the charges were true, noting that from the little I had seen of his work—largely as a result of the nature of the attacks on him—I found no evidence to support them, nor has any evidence since been presented from the public record then available to me, the only relevant point, obviously. I observed that such charges should be backed by serious evidence, reviewed the claims made privately by Faurisson's harshest critics and noted that they amounted to little, even if accurate. Since then I have not returned to the matter, except to respond to misrepresentations of what I then wrote and to make the point that to speak of the lies of a nationalist movement (Zionism, Vietnamese nationalism, or any other) is not in itself a proof of racism, a truism that Rabinbach attempts to distort into my "[attesting] to the integrity of Faurisson's motives."

The issue remains what it has always been. A man was suspended from teaching French literature at the University of Lyon on the ground that he could not be protected from violence, then charged with "falsification of history" and condemned—the first endorsement in the West of the Stalinist-fascist doctrine that the state may determine historical truth and punish deviation from it. This scandal I protested, just as I have taken far more controversial stands in favor of freedom of speech for those who express horrendous views, as explained in the *Nation* article to which Rabinbach refers, and as I will continue to do, however much this outrages commissars in Moscow, Paris or New York who choose to conceal their support for these scandals in falsehood and misrepresentation. *Noam Chomsky*

RABINBACH REPLIES

Upper Montclair, N.J.

I neither falsified nor misquoted Noam Chomsky's preface to Robert Faurisson's *Mémoire en défense*. *The Nation* slightly changed my response in the "Letters" column for May 17. It should have read, "Since he [Chomsky] did not choose to quote the relevant passage in *The Nation*, let me do so."

The issue was, and remains, that in a preface to Faurisson's book Chomsky denied that he knew Faurisson's work and declared that based on the documents that he had read, he found "no credible proof" that Faurisson is an anti-Semite. He went further than defending Faurisson's civil liberties. By calling him a "relatively unpolitical liberal," he sanctified his motives. As Chomsky's letter and other responses demonstrate, he has not altered this judgment.

Chomsky now claims that "no evidence [has] since been presented from the public record then available to me" (October 1980) that would contradict this benign view of Faurisson. In fact, at the time he wrote the preface, Chomsky was *fully* aware of Faurisson's writings. On page *x*. of the preface he cites an exhaustive article by the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet ("Paper Eichmann," published in *Esprit*, September 1980), which contains a thorough exposé of Faurisson's views. Chomsky also had at his disposal a complete dossier containing almost all of Faurisson's published and unpublished writings up to that point, *Vérité historique ou vérité politique?*, compiled by Serge Thion, Faurisson's publisher and leading defender in France (published earlier in 1980 and amply cited by Vidal-Naquet). Since Chomsky sent Thion his text with permission to "use it as he wished" (*The Nation*, February 28, 1981), he was obviously aware of Thion's book and his well-known public partisanship for Faurisson. Finally, Chomsky also had—and refers to in his letter—a personal correspondence with Vidal-Naquet alerting him to Faurisson's past and present anti-Semitism.

The most cursory reading of those documents provides ample evidence of Faurisson's anti-Semitism. (Even if Faurisson says, as he does, that he is not an anti-Semite, the issue is what he published—before October 1980, of course.) Here is a sample, drawn from Thion's collection: (1) "Hitler never ordered nor approved that anyone be killed for racial or political reasons" (p. 89 *passim*); (2) the gas chambers at Auschwitz and elsewhere are a "historical lie" (multiple references), and whatever death occurred was caused by disease (p. 83); (3) "this lie, whose origins are essentially Zionist, has made possible a gigantic political-financial swindle, whose beneficiary is primarily the State of Israel" (p. 89); (4) "The principal victims of this lie are the people of Germany and the people of Palestine" (Ibid.); (5) this lie is maintained by "colossal force of official information" (Ibid.); (6) "Hitler always considered the Jews as his enemies, and he treated them accordingly. . . . By the same token, the allies and the Jews said: 'Hitler and the Nazis want our annihilation, but it is they who will be annihilated.' For one camp, like the other, it was above all a matter of winning the war" (p. 91); (7) Chaim Weizmann, "president of the international Jewish community," . . . "declared war on Germany on 5 September 1939" (p. 187); (8) Jews wore the yellow star because "Hitler was perhaps less preoccupied with the Jewish question, than with the security of the German soldier [who] was incapable of distinguishing a Jew from a non-Jew" (p. 190); (9) "Hitler interned a part of European Jewry, but to intern is not to exterminate. There was no 'genocide' nor any 'Holocaust'" (p. 188). I could find no reference to any "heroic insurrection," though the Warsaw ghetto uprising is used to show that the Nazis were forced to protect themselves from Jews "behind the lines" (p. 190).

Need we debate whether this mélange is evidence of anti-Semitism? The sole purpose of such perversity is to prove that the Jews, who possess Satanic powers, have conspired to delude the world into thinking that they were the victims of the greatest nightmare in history. Does Chomsky really think there is no difference between saying Zionists, communists or commissars lie, and trying obsessively to "demonstrate" that Hitler never exterminated Jews, or that the Ku Klux Klan never lynched blacks? How any reasonable person could conclude that there is "no credible proof" nor any evidence "from the public record" that Faurisson is an anti-Semite, or that he is an "unpolitical liberal" remains the question par excellence of this whole sad business.

(*Continued on Page 228*)

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EDITORIALS.

Monolithic Media

Accuracy in Media, which Alan Wolfe and Michael Massing dissect and analyze extensively in this issue, works for the Reagan Administration in this country the way governments work for themselves in many other countries. AIM seeks by pressure, threats and blackmail to create the kind of cultural and political consensus that allows the authorities to rule without regard for honesty and to retain power without fear of successful opposition. Accuracy is the least of its concerns.

When governments themselves assume the consensus-building function, jails and gulags are likely to bulge with the bodies of those deemed inaccurate for daring to propose their own, unauthorized, versions of history or current events. In this country, until recently, the dissenters have remained free but marginalized, isolated and unemployed by the major media. Now that the Administration is beginning to enforce a spurious official secrets act, even that freedom may be jeopardized. The conviction of Samuel Morison for leaking information relating to defense policy does not match the widespread use of state sanctions against writers and journalists in the Soviet Union (of which the arrest of Nicholas Daniloff is a bizarre example), but it grows out of an antipathy to dissent that is shared by the super-

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powers in a time of heightened tension between them. Accuracy in the media is an inevitable victim of the cold war.

What is amazing in this country is the speed and the enthusiasm with which the national media adopt official values and promote the consensus almost before it is put forth by the authorities. Whether the issue is terrorism, drugs, the Statue of Liberty, Nicaragua, Libya or the Philippines, there is an urgent imperative to spout the line. It is almost impossible to find significant, principled dissent in the mainstream press and on the networks at anywhere near the quality and quantity that was common during the time of the Vietnam War and Watergate.

Perhaps the paranoid projects of AIM and the other right-wing and neoconservative lobbies have eroded the tradition of independent reportage. Perhaps the rewards for conformity are too great to turn down, or the support system for dissent too weak to offer an alternative to the institutions that engineer consent. The disintegration of the radical movements of the past decades removed an important test for the accuracy of official reports on every subject. Journalists and newscasters now can, and do, call anyone a Marxist-Leninist, a terrorist or a freedom fighter without fear of effective contradiction, at least in the mass media.

It is not news that information is a highly profitable commodity in our society. But we are still not able to deal with the cultural consequences of that unique historical development. The stuff in the newspapers and on the tube is for the most part beyond definitions of truth and accuracy, in the same way that deodorant sticks and frozen dinners have little to do with hygiene or nutrition. What we need is not a private group to monitor ideology—right or left—in the media, but a new consciousness about consensus, and more questions about the official story.

Killer Cops

Americas Watch, the Western Hemisphere's counterpart to Helsinki Watch, which typically investigates military dictatorships, has just completed a report on Jamaica. What prompted this unusual inquiry into a stable parliamentary state was a startling statistic: the rate of killings by police in Jamaica is one of the highest in the world. The independent newspaper *The Daily Gleaner* has reported an average of 217 a year for the last seven years in a national population of 2.3 million. That constitutes a higher rate than that of all homicides in the United States. The police killings represent about a third of all murders in Jamaica each year; in the United States police commit less than 4 percent of all homicides. In New York City alone, with a population three times greater than Jamaica's, police kill an average of thirty persons a year. "The police in Jamaica have made themselves judge, jury and executioner," says Florizelle O'Connor, the director of the Jamaica Council for Human Rights, who first brought the homicide statistics to the attention of Americas Watch.

At the council's offices in Kingston the delegation heard and read testimony of witnesses in thirty-four cases of police killings and visited some of the places where they had occurred. What was most appalling was the high proportion of cases in which the victim appeared neither to have provoked the killing nor to have been armed. According to witnesses, victims were variously cooking in the kitchen, riding a bicycle, building a wall, talking in front of the victim's own vending stall, walking, sleeping. Execution at close range was common; police thrust guns into the ear, the mouth, the stomach and, most frequently, the back. Dead men, and sometimes even wounded men, were routinely stuffed into the trunks of police cars. Two people who reported death threats to the council were subsequently killed by police officers. Sadistic bravado, perhaps emulative of Hollywood, is typical of these executioners. One detective told a man to tell his mother to prepare his "burial suit." The officer arrived with several colleagues before dawn, and as the victim begged for his life, shot him in his bed.

The unabashed swagger of these killings ill befits the British decorum of the Jamaican criminal justice system. Police Commissioner Herman Ricketts outlined the thorough procedures used to review charges of police excess, but he also defended those "front-line detectives who are willing to face M-16s and risk being shot and killed." The general belief that police are dealing with heavily armed criminals helps account for the extremely small number of convictions of policemen. But according to reports in *The Daily Gleaner*, which are based on police statistics, firearms were recovered from the victims in little more than half the killings committed by law officers (121 of the 231 cases in 1984). And last year policemen were wounded in twenty-two shootings but escaped injury in 372 others, a proportion that suggests a widespread pattern of summary execution.

In the recent past, violence in Jamaica has had a distinctly political cast. In the late 1970s, at the height of the Jamaica Labor Party's efforts to destabilize the democratic socialist government of Prime Minister Michael Manley, the level of violence soared with the J.L.P.'s introduction of semi-automatic weapons into bitter partisan warfare. Since Edward Seaga's victory in the bloody campaign of 1980, which claimed the lives of more than 800 citizens, there has been a drop in political violence. Calm marked both the 1983 elections from which Manley's Peoples National Party abstained, claiming that voter reform had not been completed, and the nationwide local elections of July 29, in which the P.N.P. triumphed.

Under Seaga, however, the majority of Jamaicans are experiencing a subtler kind of violence as a result of I.M.F. austerity measures, which have produced soaring inflation, drastic currency devaluation, up to 30 percent unemployment, cuts in public expenditure for education and health, growing malnutrition and desperate poverty. Ongoing police violence may be less a response to gunmen than it is radical social control of the growing legions of the poor.

The protests raised by the human rights council, by church groups and by the Parliamentary Ombudsman are important. But public outcry cannot resolve the problem so

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long as people's needs and rights are held in contempt and police violence is tacitly encouraged by persons in high places. Seaga's retention in his personal security staff of Keith Gardner, a police inspector renowned for violence, speaks volumes. So, at another level, does Ronald Reagan's support of Seaga. In 1985, U.S. loans and grants to Jamaica totaled $169.1 million. And since 1985, Jamaica has been a major recipient of aid to law-enforcement personnel as part of an "antiterrorism assistance" program. At the very least, aid to Jamaican police should be discontinued and other pressure brought to bear to insure that fundamental human rights are respected. BELL GALE CHEVIGNY

Bell Gale Chevigny is co-editor, with Gari LaGuardia, of Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature in the United States and Spanish America, *forthcoming from Cambridge University Press. She was a member of the Americas Watch team that went to Jamaica in July.*

Tamil Refugees

The discovery last month of 155 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who had been set adrift in lifeboats off the coast of Newfoundland by a West German captain awakened many Americans to the existence of the bloody separatist war on the South Asian island. Since 1983 violence between the mainly Hindu Tamil minority and the Buddhist Sinhalese majority has claimed at least 4,000 lives, most of them Tamil. The Tamils who live in the island's northern and eastern regions make up 12.6 percent of Sri Lanka's population of 15 million and have been demanding an independent state.

Approximately 200,000 Tamils, out of a total of 2.7 million, have sought refuge in foreign countries since sectarian troubles began three years ago, when a separatist attack precipitated a Sinhalese pogrom against Tamils and their property. Another 100,000 have been displaced inside Sri Lanka, along with 35,000 Sinhalese. Those who have emigrated have done so for a number of reasons. Thousands of fishermen were stripped of their livelihood following the imposition of government security measures aimed at limiting guerrilla activity in coastal waters. Many of them, as well as many poor, uprooted farmers, have fled to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which has a huge indigenous Tamil population. Nearly 135,000 Sri Lankan Tamils have sought refuge in Tamil Nadu, where the separatist guerrillas maintain headquarters and training camps.

Because the separatist groups are made up of young men, who are referred to as the "boys," Tamils between the ages of 15 and 35 have been subjected to indiscriminate arrest and torture as suspected terrorists. In addition, government policies and the war itself have crippled the economy in Tamil areas. Many youths who have not joined the ranks of the militants have therefore gone abroad to seek safety and jobs. They find neither in India: the guerrillas based there pressure the exiles to take up guns and return to fight, and the state's economic situation is bleak. As a result, families with the means have been selling their land and jewelry to send their children to prosperous Western countries.

As many as 50,000 Tamils have reportedly requested asylum in Europe, with most going to West Germany, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Until July 1985 their main route to the West was via East Berlin, where the lack of border controls enabled them to cross freely into the western sector and, from there, fan out across Europe. To stop the flow the Kohl government offered the East Germans increased trade credits in exchange for an agreement to turn back any Tamils not bearing valid visas for transit to the West.

At the same time, the West Germans have succeeded in making the lives of the 30,000 Tamils already there miserable, housing them in substandard dwellings and preventing them from working while their cases are pending. Authorities have granted asylum in only 6 percent of the cases. Tamils going to other countries in hopes of better treatment have encountered equally xenophobic reactions. In contrast, the Canadians have accorded humane treatment to the approximately 2,000 Sri Lankans who have requested asylum. Canada's hospitality stems partly from its capacity, demographically and economically, to absorb more immigrants, and partly from a strong pro-Tamil lobby among influential religious groups.

Only 116 Tamils have sought asylum in the United States since June 1983, and so far the Immigration and Naturalization Service has not granted any of those requests. Despite State Department reports criticizing human rights abuses by the government of President J.R. Jayewardene, the Reagan Administration has continued to provide Sri Lanka with economic aid, which has been diverted to feed the insatiable military budget, and it would not dare to take action against the staunchly pro-Western Jayewardene or to encourage Tamils to come here.

At about the time that the 155 Tamils arrived in Canada, events in Sri Lanka were, in the words of a Sri Lankan diplomat, moving in a "cautiously hopeful" direction. On August 29, leaders of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front concluded negotiations with the Jayewardene government. The talks appear to have enhanced the prospect for a settlement granting increased autonomy to Tamils. The plan, which would create nine provincial councils—two in the areas claimed by the Tamils as their homeland—falls far short of the demand for an independent Tamil state, and Madras-based guerrilla leaders have publicly rejected it. With persistence, the Indian government might be able to exert sufficient leverage to bring them around. The main Sinhalese opposition parties and the conservative Buddhist clergy, however, have already threatened to resist any such pact.

Until an agreement is reached and is being implemented, Tamils seeking asylum in the West should not be sent back to Sri Lanka, where they face immediate detention, possibly torture and continued ethnic violence. RICHARD GREENBERG

Richard Greenberg, who writes frequently about Sri Lanka, is a production associate for ABC News.

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

Michael Meets Mr. Jones

Michael Moore, whom Adam Hochschild chose to fire from his job as editor of *Mother Jones* last Tuesday, is learning to his cost the old rule that the rich are different. They think they can get away with anything. Hochschild is heir to the AMAX mining fortune, and although he has devoted substantial amounts of the family income, originally generated by African wage-slaves, to finance the quasi-liberal periodical *Mother Jones*, he can still behave like a nineteenth-century mill owner. Michael Moore is not rich, and before he came to San Francisco last spring he ran a fine weekly paper, *The Michigan Voice*, out of Flint, which is where he grew up, the son of an auto worker and the nephew of a man who took part in the famous sit-down strike of 1937 that led to the formation of the U.A.W.

When Hochschild asked Moore to come and run it, *Mother Jones*, shapeless and out of breath, had lost 80,000 subscribers and was down to 150,000. The idea was that this tough working-class editor would come west to pull the magazine together and give it a sense of direction. Moore, foolishly as it turned out, believed the P.R. which was in fact a short-term romantic fantasy of the well-heeled recruiters from *Mother Jones*. He gave up his paper in Flint and moved his life west. His girlfriend, Kathleen Glynn, closed her graphic design business and entered a wearying custody negotiation to bring her 5-year-old daughter, Natalie, with her to San Francisco. Tuesday was Natalie's first day in school, and at the end of it she and Kathy returned home to find that Michael had been fired and that Hochschild had offered him two months' salary and a moving van back to Flint.

What had Moore done wrong? I should say up front that he had recruited me as a columnist, but since Hochschild and Moore's predecessor, Deirdre English, had asked me to be such in the past, presumably that wasn't the issue. As recently as August 5, Hochschild had told Moore enthusiastically, "I like what's happening." Moore had been given all the usual pledges of editorial freedom. But Hochschild also let it be known that he was eager for Moore to print some of the large and expensive inventory already bought by English. This, at least into the October issue, didn't leave much leeway for Moore to bring his own ideas into the magazine. Among the inventory articles much disliked by Moore was the second of a two-part piece by Paul Berman on Nicaragua. It attacked the Sandinistas as Leninist souvenirs of the New Left and said they had betrayed the promise of the revolution. Moore says that he didn't care for such an article: "Reagan could easily hold it up, saying, 'See, even *Mother Jones* agrees with me.' The article was flatly wrong and the worst kind of patronizing bullshit. You would scarcely know from it that the United States had been at war with Nicaragua for the last five years."

Hochschild said, "I am exercising my prerogative as chairman of the board of directors and ordering you to run this piece." He said it didn't do any harm to be critical of the Sandinistas. The notion, as Moore gathered it, was that the Berman piece would be like a public insurance policy, demonstrating that *Mother Jones* was never taken in by the Sandinistas. Hochschild said it was best "to stay out of bed with revolutionary movements," which you may recall was the prudent approach advocated by Michael Massing in *The Nation* a year ago. Reluctantly, Moore was planning to publish the article, with an editorial rejoinder, when, out of the blue, Hochschild fired him, with the opening words, "You've created a crisis situation."

He brought up the Berman dispute and also mentioned that Moore had not supported management's decision to fire Richard Schaufler. Schaufler had applied for a job as an ad rep and had disclosed in his interview that some months earlier he had sold advertisements for Synthesis Publications, known in the Bay Area as the publishing arm of the Democratic Workers Party. Schaufler was hired, but after his second day on the job *Mother Jones*'s managers, expressing concern over Schaufler's political connections, confronted him. He said that nine months earlier he had been a member of the D.W.P. but had left. They fired him anyway. Moore said he could not support the action, in which Schaufler was victimized for his political past. I could find no one in management who would comment on the Schaufler affair, which is under grievance.

Hochschild told me he "cannot recollect" giving Moore an enthusiastic endorsement in August, denied that either Schaufler or Berman were factors, hinted that after five months Moore's performance did not satisfy him and talked vaguely about "personnel problems," the nature of which he wouldn't disclose, although if I only knew, I would understand, etc., etc.

Under Hochschild's proposed terms of severance Moore would agree to make it, in Hochschild's words, "a no-fault separation," meaning that Moore would co-sign a statement to the effect that the parting was by mutual consent. Moore would not accept this mean little "go quietly" proposal.

I think Moore was fired because, as he says, he "did not want to print lies about Nicaragua," and because it turned out that the working-class boy from Flint had ideas of his own. This was never the game plan of the rich boy in San Francisco, so he asked Moore to be "physically out of the office by Friday," which is the sort of language Michael's uncle heard from the company goons right before that famous sit-down strike of 1937.

The Political Uses of 'Human Rights'

Few human rights reports have been issued in a more politically fraught atmosphere than the one concerning Nicaragua released by the International League for Human Rights in July of this year. The report came just as the long battle over *contra* aid was nearing its climax and just as President Reagan was twisting the arm of the Senate to follow the House in voting $100 million in military and "humanitarian" assistance to the *contras*. The report harshly condemned Nicaragua, and the press gave it ample coverage. Yet it is clear, upon inspection of the report and of the circumstances surrounding its preparation, that it was a con-

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

trived coup in the campaign to win Congressional approval for *contra* aid.

Consider first the timing of the report. When the league planned its visit to Nicaragua in early February, it was well aware that the ensuing months would be politically momentous. Such circumstances should properly have triggered more than ordinary concern for straight dealing. Yet the report states flatly that neither the President of the republic nor officials in the Interior Ministry would grant interviews, thus giving the clear impression of Nicaraguan stonewalling. According to Francisco Campbell of the Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington, the league told the Nicaraguan Ambassador that its team wished to visit the country in early February. They were told that it was the worst possible time for a visit, since there were official celebrations planned for the 4th, 6th, 10th, 15th, 19th and 21st of that month. The league chose to go anyway, though informed that no officials would be able to receive its team. The State Security and Interior departments say that at no time did members of the league request a meeting, but that even if they had, they could not have been accommodated, because of the public ceremonies.

Nina Shea, program director of the league and the person who drafted the report, told my colleague James Ledbetter that the group tried to meet with Foreign Ministry people when they were in Nicaragua (a period of just five working days) but were refused, though they did speak with Alejandro Bendaña, who Shea said was in the public relations office. At first Shea said they had personally visited the Interior Ministry; then she switched this to the Foreign Ministry. She did allow to Ledbetter that the Sandinistas had "said they were busy" and couldn't meet the group. Anyone who has visited Nicaragua knows well how hard it is to arrange high-level visits at two or three days' notice, let alone a searching cross-examination of the kind sought by the league. And, in fact, Bendaña is not some lowly flack but the Secretary General, the fourth-ranking official in the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry.

Having decided to press ahead, the league's team had recruited as an "observer" and expert on Nicaragua Robert Leiken, former Maoist and current Carnegie fellow, widely known as an advocate of aid to the *contras* and as a bitter critic of the Sandinistas. As I reported here two weeks ago, Shea justified his presence on the odd ground that it was "balance" to Patricia Derian, human rights chief in the State Department under President Carter.

Equipped with Leiken and in Managua, the league's team, according to its report, used as its prime source the Permanent Commission of Human Rights, referred to henceforth by its initials in Spanish, C.P.D.H. This is often described in the United States as Nicaragua's independent human rights commission, to distinguish it from the government-sponsored body. The league had named the C.P.D.H. as an affiliate in 1985. If only to establish its criteria for witnesses, the league should properly have indicated the C.P.D.H.'s own credentials as an independent organization. On page 39 of the report the reader will find the bland words, "In August 1985, the CPDH was awarded a $44,000 grant from the National Endowment for Democracy, through PRODEMCA for the translation and distribution of CPDH reports outside of Nicaragua," with footnotes stating that the National Endowment is a U.S. government-funded organization with a bipartisan board of directors, whose stated purpose is "to promote democratic institutions and pluralism worldwide," and that PRODEMCA is a "bi-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C., which describes itself as dealing with democracy in Central America."

These words are comically disingenuous. The league knew well that at the very time the report was being drafted, PRODEMCA was taking out large advertisements in the U.S. press urging aid to the *contras*. The report then states that the C.P.D.H. had documented human rights violations not only by the Nicaraguan government but by the "armed opposition" (i.e., the *contras*). In fact, the C.P.D.H. has dutifully avoided investigating *contra* atrocities, just as *La Prensa* declined to report them, using the excuse that it could not investigate conditions in the war zone and has been obstructed by the government. This is a problem encountered by no other investigative group; nonetheless, the league solemnly recorded the C.P.D.H.'s excuse. The league states in its report its own decision to avoid any investigation of human rights violations by the "armed opposition forces."

*The story so far:—The league, aware of the explosive political timing, travels to Nicaragua in a week it has been advised it cannot meet with the government. Its main expert from outside Nicaragua is a pro-*contra *propagandist and its main source inside Nicaragua is a body partially funded by a U.S. group formed with the express purpose of lobbying for* contra *aid. The league, fully aware that its report will be a factor in the Congressional debate over military aid to the* contras, *decides to avoid any investigation of the* contras' *widely advertised breaches of human rights.*

From such shabby beginnings matters did not improve. The misrepresentations in the report are sometimes subtle, sometimes vulgar; they are profuse throughout the 211 pages. The report states at the outset that it will focus on "the treatment of human rights defenders" in Nicaragua. It states flatly that between 3,500 and 6,500 Nicaraguans are arbitrarily detained for political reasons at any given time, excluding the 2,500 National Guardsmen in prison. I'll return to these bogus numbers shortly, but the mere fact that they include such persons as *contras* captured in the field shows that the league does not, as a matter of principle, recognize the right of the Nicaraguan government to punish anyone subverting its laws. The league includes in its estimates captured *contras*, collaborators, draft resisters, Sandinistas imprisoned for abuses. All, in the league's view, are arbitrarily detained.

Remember one important point, which some would say redounds greatly to the credit of the government of Nicaragua. Unlike their counterparts in El Salvador and

(*Continued on Page 219*)

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ARTICLES.

WHO'S AFRAID OF REED IRVINE?

The Rise and Decline of Accuracy in Media

MICHAEL MASSING

It's May, and the subject of ABC's *Viewpoint* is manipulation and the media. The panelists are Tom Brokaw, Roone Arledge, Senator Jeremiah Denton, Noel Koch, Alexander Cockburn and Soviet commentator Vladimir Posner, who is on a rare visit to the United States. The event takes place at Vanderbilt University, and the questions from the audience seem earnest and well informed.

Then moderator Ted Koppel calls on Reed Irvine. The chair of Accuracy in Media launches into a tirade against Posner. "For the most part he tells disinformation or lies," Irvine fumes. "When he was on with David Brinkley he told some whoppers. . . . He has told another whopper tonight, and nobody has really corrected him."

Koppel jumps in: "Well, why don't you take this golden opportunity to do it then? Which whopper are you talking about?"

Irvine says he wants to go on and will come back to the whopper later. Posner insists on being corrected, "if possible." Irvine instead attacks an earlier Posner performance, on *Donahue*.

Koppel: "Reed, you're going to have to permit me to try to keep some order here. You have made a specific charge that Vladimir Posner has told an untruth on this program tonight. There is a unique opportunity for you two to have it out over that untruth. Go ahead."

Irvine: "Well, I'll have to confess, Ted, it slipped my mind right now."

A collective gasp of disbelief rises from the audience. Oblivious, Irvine continues denouncing Posner, and a minute later he claims to have recalled Posner's "whopper"—something about Chernobyl—but the damage is done. Irvine's bluff has been called, and there is nothing in his hand.

The performance was vintage Irvine. There was the exposure on national television (Irvine always pops up at these affairs), the familiarity with network stars ("Ted," "Reed"), the polemics (Irvine suggested that ABC identify Posner as a "paid liar") and, most significant, the utter ineffectiveness of Irvine's appearance.

Thus the AIM paradox. On the one hand, Reed Irvine seems to be everywhere—on talk shows, on panel discussions, at annual shareholder meetings. His weekly newspaper column goes to about one hundred papers, and his daily radio commentary to seventy stations. Every year he has a private meeting with *New York Times* publisher Arthur Ochs Sulzberger. After PBS broadcast its thirteen-part series on the Vietnam War, AIM managed to get its own hourlong rebuttal aired. When PBS turned down a second hour, AIM arranged for it to be screened at the White House. President Reagan saw the film and afterward wrote narrator Charlton Heston a note of appreciation. The film, wrote the President, "was just great and is something all Americans should see."

Yet although AIM's visibility may be greater than ever before, its influence is not. In fact, the more exposure AIM receives, the less popular it seems to become. Beyond a sliver of the American public, AIM has simply not been able to get its message across. Consider that a few years ago the organization's twice-monthly newsletter, "AIM Report," claimed almost 40,000 subscribers. Since then, in an effort to expand its base, AIM has resorted to a series of promotional devices. It has sent out fund-raising letters signed by the likes of Edward Teller and Gen. William Westmoreland. It has offered new subscribers an assortment of free books, from *The Spike* to *Target America: The Influence of Communist Propaganda on U.S. Media*. AIM speakers, who give hundreds of talks a year to Rotary Clubs and chambers of commerce across America, invariably make a pitch for new members. Together these ploys have netted AIM a lot of money—its current budget is $1.5 million a year—but few new members. AIM's subscribership today is only 30,000.

Michael Robinson, a media analyst at George Washington University, recently helped conduct a nationwide survey for the Times Mirror Company on public attitudes toward the press. He divides the population into a number of subgroups. One consists of those judged to be "vociferous" critics. Robinson believes that most of AIM's members belong to this group. Its size? About 5 percent of the population. Irvine, says Robinson, "is the public relations arm of that 5 percent."

If AIM has failed to enlist the support of a broad public, it has fared even worse with the media themselves. As its primary mission, AIM seeks to improve the performance of American news organizations. Its introductory brochure proclaims, "For Fairness, Balance and Accuracy in News Reporting." According to the pamphlet, AIM "investigates complaints of serious media misdeeds"; takes "proven cases" to top media officials, "asking for corrections"; "mobilizes public pressures to bring about remedial action"; and "works for adoption by the media of higher standards of reporting, editing and a responsible approach to the news."

"We're exceptionally careful," says Murray Baron, the organization's president. "Our record of being accurate is close to 100 percent." Communications director Bernard Yoh adds: "People erroneously call us conservative and right-

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wing. It really makes me sad because we try very hard to do everything evenhandedly. With a name like Accuracy in Media, you can't take chances. People criticize us all the time, but no one has ever challenged us on substantiation or facts."

In reality, AIM is intensely ideological. The content of its attacks on the media places it on the extreme right wing of the political spectrum. What's more, although AIM is forever lecturing journalists on the need to maintain high professional standards, the organization itself has violated virtually every rule in the book. In the process it has alienated journalists left, right and center.

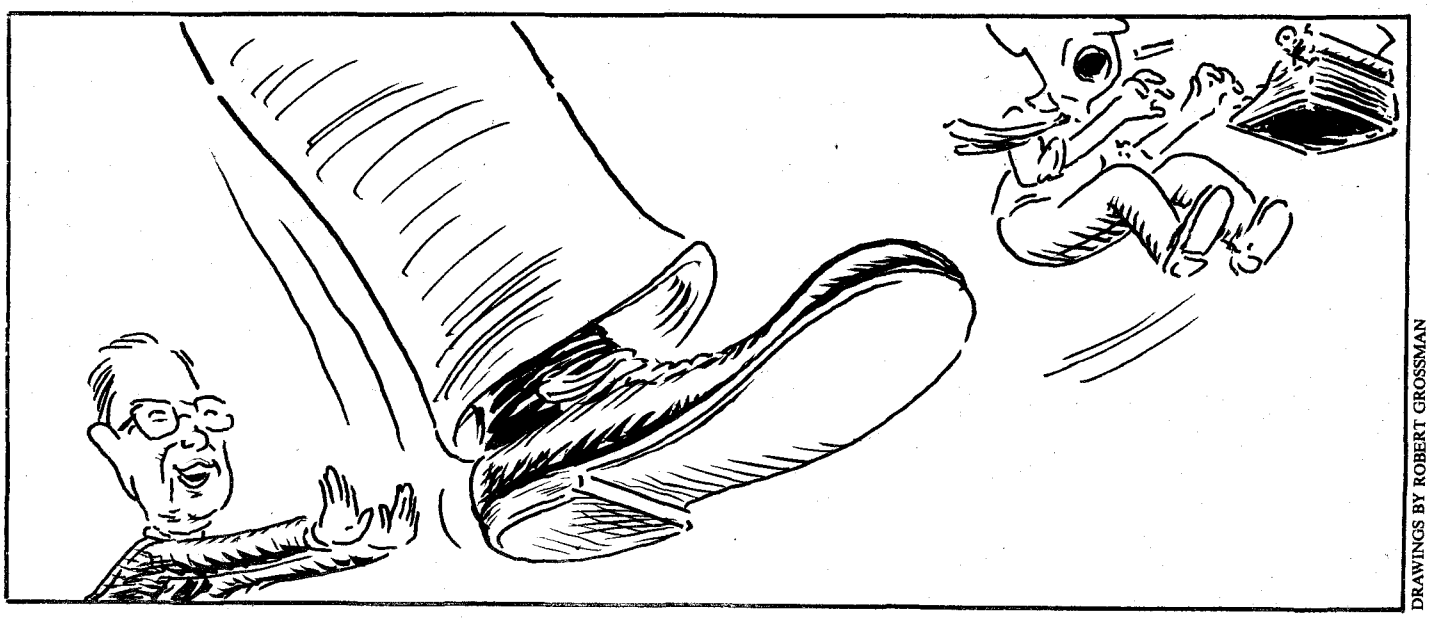
It is undeniable that in recent years the nation's media have tacked sharply right. In an era when ABC gives George Will a podium, *The New York Times* gives Sydney Schanberg the boot, and America is about to be shown as *Amerika*, the Reagan Administration has succeeded in setting the media agenda. AIM has played a role in that shift. Especially in the first two years of the Administration, when the organization came of age, AIM's agitation against the "liberal" press contributed to a national climate of hostility toward the press. Reporters and editors were put on the defensive. Irvine even won some grudging praise from journalists, who, while having no illusions about AIM's politics, valued the group for helping keep news organizations on their toes.

Over time, however, AIM's ugly tactics have lost it whatever good will it may have once enjoyed. Today, AIM's zest for venom and vendetta has reduced its credibility to an all-time low, so that even its occasional well-founded complaints go unattended. This account traces the self-destruction of a self-proclaimed media watchdog.

AIM's current ineffectuality is rooted in the group's earliest days. Reed Irvine founded AIM in 1969. An economist, Irvine at the time was working for the Federal Reserve Board. He asked Arthur Krock, the retired Washington bureau chief of *The New York Times*, to chair the organization. Krock refused. As Irvine explains in the introduction to *Media Mischief and Misdeeds*, a collection of his newspaper columns, Krock felt that his continuing ties to *The Times* would preclude him from publicly criticizing the paper. Owing to that experience, Irvine writes, he realized "that the type of organization I had in mind would have to be representative of and run by consumers of the journalistic product, not by the producers." And so, he says, "we created Accuracy in Media with the deliberate policy of not involving active journalists in its work or direction."

Irvine turned instead to people who had quite extraordinary backgrounds, at least for work in media criticism. As executive secretary he enlisted Abraham Kalish, a former employee of the Defense Intelligence School, run by the U.S. Army. Bernard Yoh, another early member, was an expert in counterinsurgency and psychological operations; a former adviser to South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, he had helped set up the Sea Swallows, an elite paramilitary unit. AIM's first contribution, for $200, came from Wilson C. Lucom, a retired businessman who had married into the Willys-Overland automotive fortune. Lucom, who today is AIM's vice president, had long been involved in anticommunist activities, some of them quite offbeat. During the 1967 march on the Pentagon, he flew in a Rumanian refugee and perched him atop a cherry picker, there to harangue demonstrators on the evils of communism.

In its first few years AIM's operations were quite modest. Kalish, who wore fluorescent bow ties and lizard-skin shoes, received no salary and saved on expenses by renting office space at a discount from his wife, who ran a secretarial service. It was not long, though, before the fledgling organization began showing signs of its fund-raising prowess; by 1973 it was taking in more than $50,000 a year. It was also beginning to have an impact. For instance, in 1972 it helped persuade ABC to make five corrections to a documentary about the arms race. Another protest, over a *New York Times* column, earned an admiring letter from Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, which began, "I believe you must be the most thorough reader that *The New York Times* has, and I think in the particular instance that you mention in your letter of January 24 you are correct." By May 1973, AIM's



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achievements had won it a front-page feature in *The Wall Street Journal*.

AIM's great strength lay in its ability to attract attention. Kalish and Irvine flooded newspapers with letters to the editor; when some were rejected, they would purchase an advertisement in the offending paper and there print the letters. In 1975, AIM began buying shares of stock in major news organizations, thereby gaining the right to attend their annual meetings. Irvine took advantage of this access to deliver lengthy speeches about shoddy reporting and demand that corrective action be taken. As embarrassed executives fumbled for a response, Irvine seemed a David doing combat with the media giants of America.

In 1977 one of those giants offered AIM rare words of praise. *Washington Post* ombudsman Charles Seib devoted a full column to AIM's activities, and it was thoroughly respectful in tone. "It sticks in my craw, but I'll say it: Irvine and his AIM are good for the press," he wrote. "The same logic that says the institutions of government require a vigilant and critical press must also say that the press needs vigorous criticism, including the Irvine brand." Coming from the enemy camp, that column was perhaps the ultimate tribute to AIM's clout.

Seib's comments point to a key element in AIM's success. By the late 1970s American news organizations were entering a period of uncommon introspection. The might that the press had amassed after the Vietnam War and Watergate created a strong public backlash. Journalists, who were just getting used to seeing themselves in movies, now stood accused of arrogance and elitism. Increasingly sensitive to such charges, the industry took pains to listen to outside critics, no matter how intemperate they might have seemed. AIM thus won a hearing that had been denied it a few years earlier.

Target: Liberals

Even more important was the shift in the country's political mood. As conservative forces mobilized over the Panama Canal treaty, SALT II and the invasion of Afghanistan, as militarism and anticommunism gained sway throughout the land, the "liberal" media became a central target. AIM would serve as the right's battering ram. Nowhere was this more apparent than over the issue of Central America. With leftist forces surging in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, reporters flocked to the region, there to challenge the official pronouncements out of Washington. AIM soon declared its own war against those correspondents.

On June 26, 1980, ABC's *20/20* aired a segment on life in Nicaragua one year after the revolution. Although acknowledging the presence of some human rights problems, correspondent David Marash reported that a vibrant opposition still existed in the country and that a totalitarian outcome was far from certain. AIM was apoplectic. It denounced ABC for painting a rosy picture of Sandinista Nicaragua and for refusing to recognize the communist menace there. Irvine wrote letters of protest to ABC executives. Word went out that a retraction was in the works.

At that point producer Lowell Bergman drew up a highly detailed rebuttal to AIM's charges, seeking to back up every assertion in the piece. The effort succeeded in averting a retraction, but the experience was a grueling one. As Bergman recalls it, "AIM stirred up the executives, putting the fear of God in them that they might be seen as too soft on communism." Despite several attempts Bergman himself did not manage to return to Central America. "I heard comments over the years," he says, "that my story was so sympathetic to the Sandinistas that I was identified as pro-revolution on Central America."

AIM also targeted Karen DeYoung of *The Washington Post*. In 1979 she had covered the revolution in Nicaragua, and AIM accused her of flacking for the Sandinistas. Here is a typical comment from "AIM Report": "Karen DeYoung has been to the Marxist Sandinistas what Herbert Matthews of *The New York Times* was to Fidel Castro back in the 1950's—an ardent promoter and defender." In its campaign against DeYoung, AIM was interested in more than her dispatches. In 1980 she taught a course on international reporting at the Washington School, a seminar program sponsored by the Institute for Policy Studies. For AIM, as for the right generally, I.P.S. is Kremlin-on-the-Potomac, and when the organization heard that DeYoung was teaching there, it sent two representatives to enroll in the course and to tape-record it. During one class, about reporting on guerrilla movements, for which William Shawcross was the guest speaker, DeYoung remarked, "Most journalists now, most Western journalists at least, are very eager to seek out guerrilla groups, leftist groups, because you assume they must be the good guys."

In May 1980 the quotation surfaced in "AIM Report," where Irvine cited it as proof of DeYoung's pro-Sandinista sympathies. Coming at a time when *The Post* was being attacked frequently for its alleged liberalism, AIM's barrage against DeYoung created some queasiness. As one *Post* editor recalls, AIM, by putting a "spotlight" on DeYoung, "caused some people discomfort." In particular AIM seemed to be targeting chair of the board Katharine Graham and her son Donald, attempting to plant in them seeds of doubt about the performance of their young reporter.

In 1982, AIM's attention shifted to another Central America correspondent, Raymond Bonner of *The New York Times*. That year's index to "AIM Report" lists twenty-two references to Bonner. In July an entire newsletter was devoted to him, charging that his "advocacy" journalism "had been worth a division to the communists in Central America." The newsletter urged readers to write Arthur Ochs Sulzberger to "suggest that he re-examine Raymond Bonner's performance in the light of the facts cited in this article." Irvine also raised the matter at his annual meeting with Sulzberger. Not long after, Bonner was summoned back to New York and reassigned to the metro desk. *The Times* said the shift was routine. Nonetheless, AIM greeted the event with glee. "You can quit writing to Mr. Sulzberger at *The New York Times* about Raymond Bonner," Irvine wrote.

The episode sent a chill through the Central America press corps. Bonner had been attacked from many quarters,

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but AIM had been his most relentless critic. Whatever *The Times*'s real reasons for recalling Bonner, the event seemed to confirm AIM's power. Two years into the Reagan Administration, the once-obscure organization had become a formidable force.

The Tide Turns

However, 1982 was to prove the peak of AIM's influence. For even as AIM was gaining visibility, journalists were seriously questioning its methods. The Bonner episode was a case in point. AIM was not content simply to analyze Bonner's dispatches; it also made charges about his personal background. On their visit to *The New York Times* in 1982, Reed Irvine and Murray Baron told Sulzberger of their suspicion that, prior to joining *The Times*, Bonner "had some connection with the Pacific News Service, a spinoff from the radical Institute for Policy Studies." The basis for the charge? "Unconfirmed information from two different sources," according to "AIM Report." One source was a journalist who had met Bonner in Bolivia; the other, a State Department official. The news service denied having employed Bonner, but Irvine dismissed that. "If there were a connection they might want to conceal it," he wrote in the newsletter. He expressed his hope that *Times* executives were looking into the matter.

Look into it they did. Sydney Gruson, vice chair of *The Times*, asked then-foreign editor Craig Whitney to assess AIM's charges. He reported back in a memorandum: "Accuracy in Media ought to change its name. Its attack against Bonner is filled with so much rumor, innuendo, and mistakes that they clearly don't know accuracy from a hole in the ground, and maybe a good lawyer ought to take them to court and teach them what libel is."

Gruson's letter to Irvine was similarly scornful in tone:

> To the best of our knowledge, Raymond Bonner has never worked for Pacific News Service, under his own name or any alias, nor had any connection with it that we know of, whatever your "unconfirmed information from two different sources" (and no newspaper would ever make such a charge, or write it, based on such flimsy sourcing as this). I can't believe you are serious about the suggestion to cross-examine Mr. Bonner on the basis of third-hand information from some journalist, whom you do not name, who allegedly met Mr. Bonner in La Paz.

Even that overlooks the strangest aspect of the incident—that Pacific News Service should be considered such a sinister outfit as to taint anyone associated with it. All in all, AIM's case against Bonner was so zany that it drove executive editor A.M. Rosenthal, in an interview with *Editor & Publisher*, to declare:

> AIM criticizes the press for political motivation. It's pure agit prop, just as the communists use agit prop. They seize on a point and carry on a propaganda campaign against the paper or the individual. . . . The only people who have no credibility as far as I'm concerned are the AIM people. Absolutely none.

The Washington Post, too, was gaining a quick education on the world of AIM. As the drumbeat against Karen DeYoung continued, it seemed that AIM was interested less in criticizing her work than in damaging her career. Mention of DeYoung's I.P.S. class was not limited to that initial 1980 newsletter; it was raised time and again, in newsletters, in newspaper columns, in a fund-raising ad. My own unsystematic reading of AIM literature turned up some dozen references in all.

The clincher came in the wake of the Grenada invasion. Among the thousands of documents seized on the island was a 1979 letter to Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. The letter, written by Roberto Alvarez, a former staff member of the human rights commission of the Organization of American States, offered Bishop both ideological exhortation and gossip about U.S. diplomats in the Caribbean. The letter also had a postscript describing DeYoung as the bearer of the letter and the source of some of its contents. The envelope was marked "By Hand" and "Courtesy of Karen DeYoung."

The letter came into the possession of AIM, which in January 1984 featured it as the lead item in its newsletter. The issue began by tweaking the press for ignoring the documents, which, it asserted, "include some dirty linen of some of the sacred cows of the liberal media, including even some media personalities themselves." (AIM has a way with metaphors.) Exhibit A was the letter to Bishop. "AIM Report" noted that DeYoung denied carrying the letter, but rejected that out of hand: "We find it odd that anyone would write a letter of this type which said that it was being hand-carried by another person without first getting the person's agreement." Needless to say, the account dredged up the classroom quotation and used it to attack DeYoung's Nicaragua coverage yet again, even though she had last been assigned to the country more than four years earlier.

When I asked DeYoung about the episode, she adamantly denied having carried the letter. In fact, she said she has long had a policy of not carrying letters for anyone. "You can't appear to be speaking for anybody," she told me. Alvarez, she explained, had asked her to carry a package for Bishop, but she had refused. "He subsequently sent it another way," DeYoung said, "and it ended up with Bishop." DeYoung told all of this to Irvine, too, but to little avail.

The upshot of AIM's campaign against DeYoung? Since the attacks began, DeYoung has served as *The Post*'s foreign editor and London bureau chief, two of the best jobs at the paper. Publisher Donald Graham calls her a "terrific" reporter, and editors commonly use words like "star" to describe her. AIM, meanwhile, gets less glowing reviews. Graham says that Irvine has a "mean streak," evident in his tendency to "throw around accusations about people being communists." And that, he adds, "really reduces his effectiveness quite substantially."

"Irvine's reputation here is very bad because he behaves very badly," says Richard Harwood, deputy managing editor. "He's made some pretty outrageous charges against people here at the paper." Chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland is blunter: "What is remarkable about Irvine's complaints is that they're routinely wrong."

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Inaccuracy in AIM

A survey of recent AIM literature reveals Hoagland's remark to be apt indeed. Some examples:

The Woman and the Coat. AIM frequently criticizes the press for its excessive use of unidentified sources. In 1981, for instance, AIM, miffed by an unflattering *Newsweek* article about President Reagan's work habits, ran an ad in *The Washington Post* offering $5,000 to anyone who could identify the sources cited in the piece. The organization, however, has no qualms about using such sources when they suit its own purpose. In an article about *The Washington Post* that appeared in the October 1985 issue of *Conservative Digest*, Reed Irvine recounted that in January 1978, *Post* reporter Elizabeth Becker walked out of a press conference given by a Cambodian refugee who had come to Washington to tell of his ordeal. According to Irvine:

> *The Washington Post* decided against running a story about his revelations. Its reporter, Elizabeth Becker, walked out of Pin Yathay's press conference, and a young lady who helped her with her coat says she heard her say, "Who needs to listen to this junk?"

Irvine noted that Becker denied making the remark, but added, "There is no denying that she filed no story."

Becker did more than deny the quotation. She asked a reporter with United Press International, who had left the meeting with her, to draft a statement confirming that she had never uttered such a comment. Furthermore, Becker, who went to the press conference on her lunch hour, was one of very few reporters to attend. She says she left when it seemed to be winding down, and then only because she was due back at the office. Her editors decided not to go with a story on the conference because they believed it didn't add much to what the paper had already run on Cambodian refugees. In the years since, Becker has written numerous articles about the brutality of the Khmer Rouge, and a book by her on the subject is due out in the fall. Irvine mentions none of this in his article. All he seems to care about is that some unnamed "young lady" who helped Becker on with her coat eight years ago claims to have overheard her make a flippant remark.

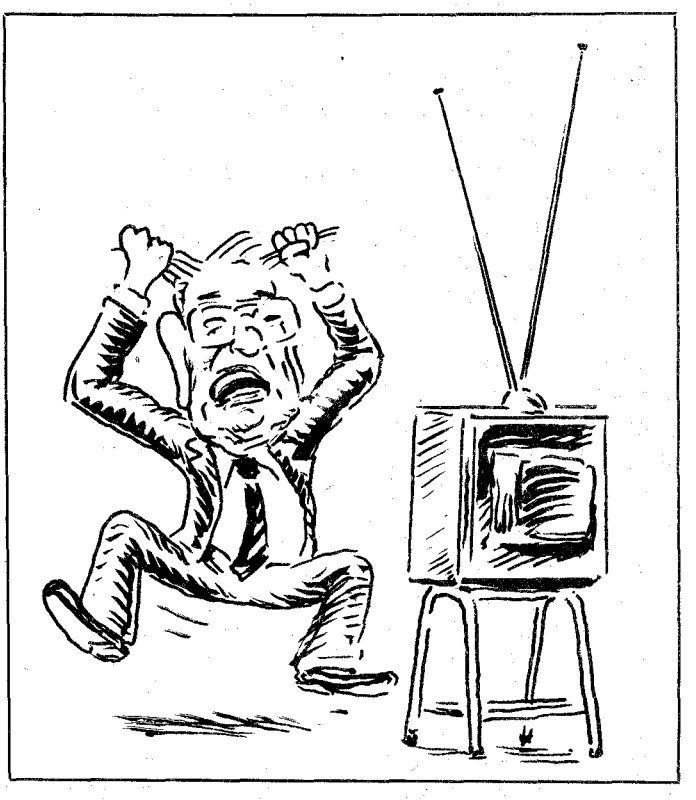
The Former Colleague. Last fall, after *The New York Times* announced it was dropping Sydney Schanberg from its Op-Ed page, Irvine devoted his syndicated column to an attack on Schanberg's coverage of Cambodia. This is how Irvine concluded:

> Schanberg claims his reporting had no effect on the outcome [of the war], but a former colleague in Cambodia believes that Schanberg expected the communists to treat him as a hero when they took Phnom Penh because he had done so many stories in their favor.

That is a most damning accusation. If true, it would raise serious questions about Schanberg's professionalism. In fact, the charge—anonymous, of course—has a most questionable source. Schanberg's "former colleague" is Dennis Cameron, a freelance photographer who worked in Cambodia at the same time as Schanberg. In October 1984, after *The Killing Fields* was released, Irvine sent Schanberg a manuscript by Cameron that was being prepared for publication in "AIM Report." The article ran nine pages and was, from start to finish, a diatribe against Schanberg, portraying him as a lazy, malicious, ill-tempered man who mistreated all those around him. Lending an air of authenticity to the manuscript were quotations supposedly from conversations with Schanberg's interpreter, Dith Pran, and Pran's wife. After she had expressed concern about her husband, according to Cameron, Schanberg had reassured her: "Don't worry about your husband's safety. . . . He's my responsibility and I'll take good care of him. We'll be treated as heroes when the Khmer Rouge enter the city—I've done many stories in their favor during the war."

In his cover letter to Schanberg, Irvine asked for a response within the next two weeks. "If I don't hear from you by then," he wrote, "I will assume that the article is factually accurate as far as you are concerned." Schanberg got back to Irvine with a six-page letter drafted by his lawyer. A paragraph-by-paragraph rebuttal of Cameron's manuscript, it maintained that virtually every statement was a fabrication. Regarding the conversation in which Schanberg allegedly made his "hero" remark, the letter stated: "Dith Pran, his wife and Mr. Schanberg all deny the conversation related in the second paragraph of page one. This conversation is entirely fabricated." In fact, the letter observed, "other than an occasional casual greeting to Mr. Cameron, Mr. Dith never had a conversation with him." The letter listed twenty-nine concoctions and falsehoods, and it strongly hinted at a libel suit should the Cameron account be published.

In the end, Irvine decided not to run the article, grumbling in the process about the letter's "chilling effect." However, when it came to giving Schanberg a parting shot



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last fall, Irvine, unable to contain himself, trotted out the charge from Schanberg's "former colleague"—fully aware of Schanberg's insistence that the remark had been created from whole cloth.

Balancing Act. AIM frequently condemns news accounts for their lack of balance, yet it consistently fails to get the other side of the story. Throughout its campaign against Karen DeYoung, AIM rarely afforded her the opportunity to give her own interpretation of events. Jon Alpert, a freelance filmmaker who reports for NBC on a variety of subjects, including life inside socialist countries and leftist guerrilla movements, has been condemned by AIM at regular intervals since 1980, when the group went after him for a report on El Salvador. "They never talk to me," he says. "They are basically slandering us. If I had the time, I'd sue [Irvine]. His journalistic standards are much lower than any of the reports he criticizes himself."

Despite AIM's frequent attacks on Raymond Bonner, it never once contacted him for his side of the story. When asked about this, Irvine replied: "What I do is critique what reporters have put in the public record. . . . This doesn't mean that I am opposed to interviewing reporters, and I sometimes try to do so. I have found over the years that many of them are not very cooperative when asked about their stories, and this seems particularly true of reporters at *The Times*, who seem to be very quick to refer me to their editors. If I am inaccurate in my critiques, the reporters or editors should point out my errors. I have never received any criticism of what we wrote about Bonner from Bonner or anyone else at *The Times*."

That's quite a belabored effort to defend a glaring violation of journalistic fairness. What's more, it is grossly inaccurate. AIM did not only criticize Bonner's dispatches; it made wild, unsubstantiated charges about his background. And, as already mentioned, Gruson's letter criticized Irvine in the strongest terms possible. (Incidentally, Irvine's comment was made in writing. He would not consent to my request for a face-to-face interview.)

Furthermore, those who feel wronged by "AIM Report" can forget about writing letters to the editor. In reading through five years' worth of the newsletter, I came across exactly one letter—an ironic twist for an organization that squawks loudly whenever its own letters fail to appear.

The Grand Inquisitor. In a sense, those not contacted by AIM are the lucky ones. Irvine's interviews are often less a matter of inquiry than inquisition. Consider the case of Col. Gains Hawkins. Hawkins is a retired Army intelligence officer who criticized Gen. William Westmoreland on CBS's documentary *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception.* Shortly after the program aired, Hawkins received a telephone call from the AIM chair. "Reed Irvine came on pretty strong with me," recalls Hawkins, who now lives in West Point, Mississippi. "I resented that. He gave me the impression he was trying to get me to 'crawfish'—to get me to renege on some of the things I'd said." After about five minutes, says Hawkins, "I lost my cool and told him to go to hell. I couldn't take the guy."

In 1983, Helen Marmor produced a documentary for NBC on the Russian Orthodox Church. The program greatly displeased AIM, which charged that it ignored the repressive religious policies of the Soviet state. A few days after the broadcast, Irvine called Marmor. She took notes of the conversation and wrote them up in a memorandum. "Irvine called this morning to get my views, as he put it," the memorandum states. "His goal was, instead, to push, prod and needle. . . . He kept going back again and again to questions implying I was hoodwinked or pro-Soviet in my attitudes and I commented that I wanted [him] to make sure not to quote me out of context; he admitted he was taping the conversation; he made an effort to throw me off balance by suggesting that if I went to interview Pontius Pilate, I would not have bothered to get the views of Jesus Christ because Christ was only a troublemaker and should be crucified; I finally became angered and responded that, on the contrary, two thousand years ago, Irvine would be voicing the views of the Establishment and would have pilloried Christ; that I found his question insulting and outrageous and that it was best to end the conversation."

Sweetheart, Get Me Fact Checking. Last September, Irvine attacked the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for approving a grant to Peter Davis to make a documentary about Nelson and Winnie Mandela. He grumbled in "AIM Report":

> Peter Davis was the producer of the notoriously unfair CBS documentary, "The Selling of the Pentagon" and the even more notorious "Hearts and Minds," a savage condemnation of our efforts to try to save Vietnam from communism. . . . Why does the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which is now in the control of Reagan appointees, feel obliged to underwrite what is bound to be a glorification of an African terrorist by a producer whose dislike of this country and its institutions has been quite clearly revealed in his previous work?

This commentary is revealing in a number of ways. There is Irvine's characterization of Nelson Mandela as a terrorist. There is his clear appeal for partisanship in the administering of C.P.B. grants. Most remarkable of all, though, Irvine has the wrong Peter Davis. The recipient of the grant was not the producer of *Hearts and Minds* but an altogether different filmmaker. Irvine could have easily determined that by calling either Davis or the C.P.B., but he apparently checked with neither.

Old Faithful

Nothing has shattered AIM's pretensions to be a media monitor more than its eruptions at annual shareholder meetings. Irvine seeks to commandeer those proceedings with a weird assortment of insinuating questions, oddball board nominations and tendentious resolutions. At the 1984 meeting of *The Washington Post*, for instance, Irvine became so disruptive that he was threatened with ejection. The meeting ground to a halt as Irvine listed eighteen letters he had sent to the paper over the previous eight months. Precisely to avoid such spectacles, Ben Bradlee—who has called Irvine a "retromingent vigilante" (a vigilante who urinates backwards)—stopped attending the *Post* meetings in 1981.

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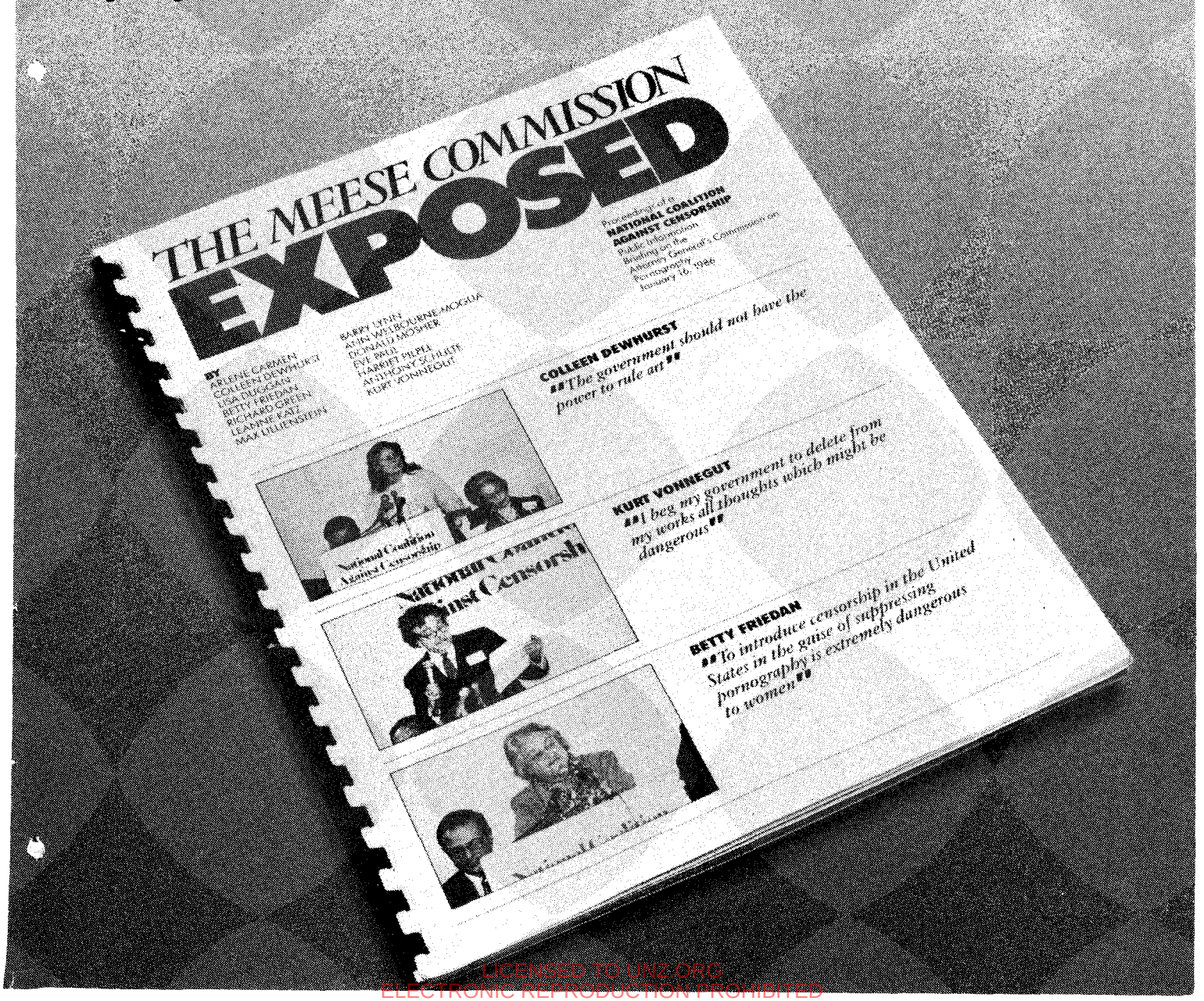

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At CBS's sessions Irvine can be counted on to bring up Walter Cronkite. To Irvine, Cronkite is a cog in the Soviet propaganda machine. At the 1982 gathering Irvine stood up and declared that "Mr. Cronkite has demonstrated over the years a singular obtuseness on the security of the United States and what seems to be a naïve trust in the Soviet Union." As proof he cited a recent conversation with an unnamed journalist who confided in him:

> Any journalist stationed in the Soviet Union for any lengthy period of time that came away without feeling and expressing strong revulsion for the communist totalitarian system must be suspected of having been recruited. Mr. Cronkite was in Moscow in 1946-48. I would very much like to know, if Mr. Cronkite were here, if he could cite any articles, speeches or broadcasts which he has made in recent years in which he had clearly enunciated his revulsion for the communist system.

At this year's meeting Cronkite was again excoriated, this time for allegedly supporting unilateral disarmament. Irvine accordingly asked that Cronkite be removed from the network's board of directors. He also attacked CBS on the subject of employee drug use (too much—Irvine wanted countermeasures), ombudsmen (not enough—Irvine wanted more hired) and coverage of Nicaragua ("Rather Atrocious," as the newsletter summed it up). Throughout the first hour of the meeting CBS chair Thomas Wyman wearily let Irvine talk on. However, as the question period began and Irvine jumped to his feet even before the ground rules could be summarized, Wyman had had enough; he called on someone else.

"I have a question!" Irvine shouted. "Are you going to take us in order or are you going to ignore me?"

"Of all the things I may be accused of," Wyman said icily, "ignoring you in this meeting will not be on the list."

Where the Money Comes From

Those who toil in the field of media criticism generally seek to conduct themselves like Caesar's wife—above suspicion. Public service groups, which AIM purports to be, disclose their sources of funding as a matter of principle. But AIM is an exception. Irvine says that about two-thirds of the group's money comes from small contributors giving $100 or less a year. As for bigger ones, he writes, "We do not comment on AIM contributors, except for those who have given us permission to publicize their gifts." In that category he mentions only three: the Allied Educational Foundation, which underwrites the AIM speakers' bureau; Shelby Cullom Davis, a former U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland, now a New York investment banker; and Richard Mellon Scaife, deep pocket to many right-wing groups. Each has given AIM hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past few years. Irvine adds: "I won't comment on any others, and I think the reasons ought to be clear to you. I don't like to see our donors called by the Michael Massings of this world and interrogated as though there was something wrong with having given money to AIM."

A little probing indicates why Irvine might be so sensitive. In October 1982 an "AIM Report" ran the following item:

> We suggested after the CBS smear of General Westmoreland that Mike Wallace, who was the correspondent on that program, ought to be fired. On September 26, Wallace did a segment for "60 Minutes" on the labor union boycott of Coors beer. To my surprise, the Coors Company came out looking very good and the boycott sponsors looked asinine. The charges of discrimination against minorities, women and gays were shot down by the employees themselves, and Coors was given high marks for its treatment of its workers. Is Mike striving to improve his image? Letters of commendation would be in order.

Coming from a media watchdog, such a tribute seems strange. After all, the broadcast was praised not for any particular journalistic merit, only for making Coors look good. The passage takes on different shadings in light of the fact that the Adolph Coors Foundation has been an important backer of AIM for years. AIM communications director Bernard Yoh and Coors representatives confirm this.

A frequent critic of the press's treatment of corporate America, AIM receives funds from numerous other corporations. Mobil Oil has been one of its biggest corporate backers. Again, Yoh confirms this. Such information is worth knowing when AIM gives Mobil an award for its aggressive media policy, as it did in 1981, or praises the company for a "fascinating" advertisement, as it did in 1982. Likewise, when AIM criticizes CBS for a report on the handling of a dangerous Union Carbide pesticide, it helps to know that Union Carbide supports the group financially. AIM also gets money from power companies; coincidentally, it has been an ardent defender of nuclear power.

Grinding the Ax

In addition to criticizing the press from a heavily biased perspective, AIM has actively pushed political causes. Thus, in 1981, the organization helped sponsor a press conference in Washington for José Francisco Cardenal, a former Nicaraguan official who had left the country after growing disillusioned with the Sandinistas. He was soon to become an important *contra* leader. The conference had nothing to do with the media, focusing instead on Cardenal's accusations of Sandinista repression.

More recently, in April, AIM distributed a glossy State Department publication recounting the claims of José Alvaro Baldizón, a onetime official in Nicaragua's Interior Ministry who, on defecting to the United States, circulated tales of Sandinista brutality. Baldizón's activities were closely supervised by the Reagan Administration, and several human rights groups have questioned the veracity of his claims. Nevertheless, the so-called nonpartisan media monitor peddled the Baldizón brochure to its subscribers at $2.75 a copy.

On the issue of Afghanistan, Irvine has appealed to subscribers of "AIM Report" to write their Congressional representatives and urge their support for a resolution favoring U.S. assistance to "the freedom fighters in Afghanistan." He has also solicited contributions to the Committee for a Free Afghanistan, a Washington-based organization that has pushed the Afghan rebels' cause since 1981.

AIM's support for the committee is not surprising. It was

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founded with the help of the Council for the Defense of Freedom, an organization with intimate ties to AIM. The council operates out of AIM's own offices. Irvine sits on its board of directors and is considered one of its most active members. His son, Donald, executive secretary of AIM, also serves as the council's treasurer. Murray Baron, Wilson Lucom and Bernard Yoh all sit on the council board.

The group, which got its start in 1951 as the Council Against Communist Aggression, provides information to Congressional staff members; publishes *The Washington Inquirer*, a zealous right-wing weekly; sends out mass mailings; and otherwise promotes the cause of "freedom." As spelled out in its brochure, the council's agenda includes building a military establishment "second to none," abandoning détente and "extending economic and military aid to all countries seeking to retain or regain their independence and sovereignty, and to freedom forces resisting communist tyranny." Nonpartisan activities all.

An AIM Scorecard

As stated in its introductory brochure, AIM seeks to obtain "corrections" and "remedial action" from news organizations. How successful has it been at that task? To test AIM's effectiveness, I followed up on some of its recent campaigns.

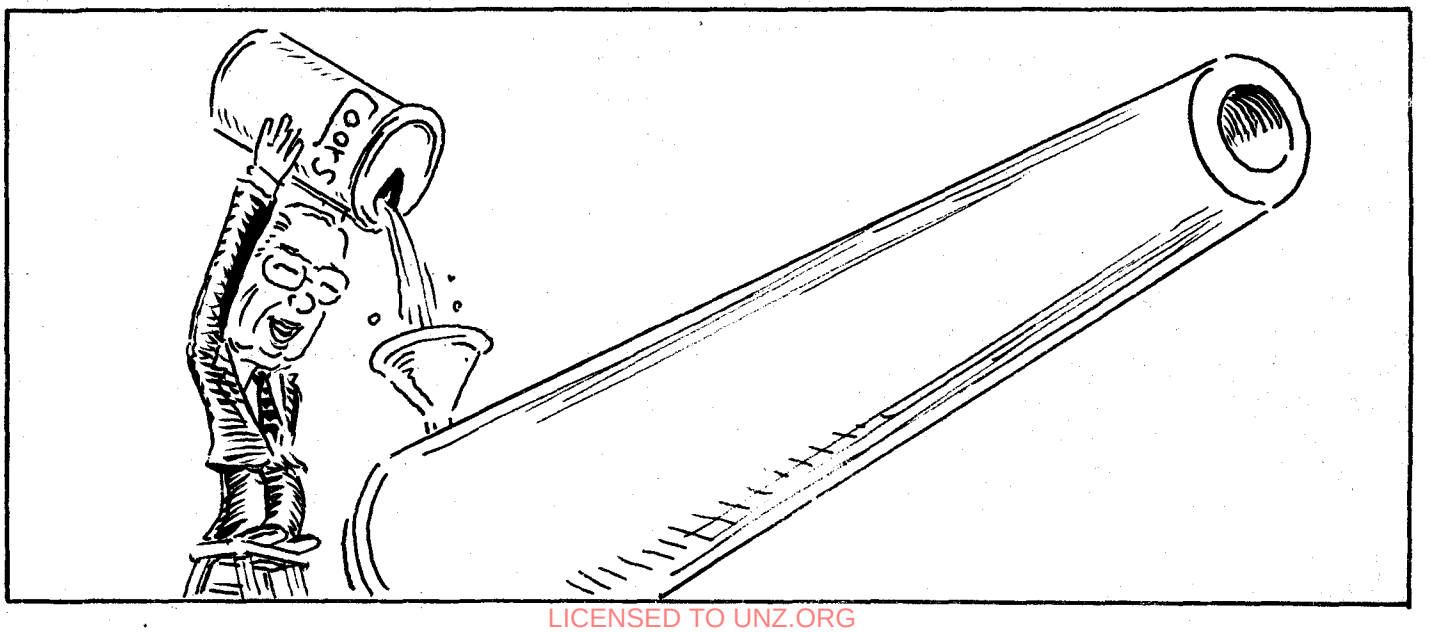
Last September, AIM attacked NBC's *Today* show for broadcasting Jon Alpert's report on Othal Brand, a Texas agribusinessman whose holdings extend into Central America. At one point, Alpert contrasted the hefty profits Brand was making with the meager wages he was paying his farmhands. This riled AIM, which claimed in its newsletter that Brand was "another victim of a camera-wielding smear artist." Alpert, charged "AIM Report," was a "quintessential America-knocker." A subsequent issue of the newsletter noted with satisfaction that *Today* had invited Brand to appear on the show to give his side of the story.

A victory for AIM? I called Steve Friedman, executive producer of *Today*. He told me that Brand's appearance "had nothing to do with AIM." Friedman said that Brand himself had complained about his treatment and that the decision to invite him reflected the show's recent interest in providing time to disgruntled news subjects. Friedman maintained that when he made the decision to invite Brand, he didn't even know that AIM was involved; if he had, he added, he would have been reluctant to put Brand on, because it would have given AIM "more credit than it deserves."

That explanation, of course, could be self-serving. After all, Friedman would not look good if he were seen to be caving in to an outside group. But Alpert told me a similar story. "To NBC's credit, it has stood up to Irvine every time," he said. The network "pays more attention to AIM than it should," Alpert added. "If you add up the man-hours that NBC devotes to dealing with Reed Irvine, it would be very costly." Nonetheless, he insisted, "NBC protects its reporters. They've really stood up for me in ways that I'm grateful for."

In tracking AIM's influence at *The New York Times*, I took as my compass an August 1985 issue of "AIM Report," titled "The Sandinista Debt to the Times." Tracing the newspaper's coverage of Nicaragua back to 1978, it charged *The Times* with repeating "Castro's disinformation" and accused its editorial writers of "drinking deeply from the bottle of revolutionary booze." Subscribers were asked to write letters of protest to Sulzberger, and, at his annual meeting with the *Times* publisher, Irvine suggested that the paper run his syndicated column on its Op-Ed page.

To discuss Irvine's visits to *The Times*, I interviewed Sydney Gruson, who attends the meetings with Sulzberger. The sessions began in 1978, when *The Times*, disturbed by AIM's antics at annual shareholder meetings, offered Irvine private conversations with the publisher if he would only leave the stockholders in peace. As Gruson put it, "We don't want our annual meetings turned into a circus." Irvine is generally accorded a respectful hearing. "We never use terms like 'retromingent,'" Gruson observed. "I take Mr. Irvine seriously enough never to just brush off his allegations." Gruson, who noted that



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AIM can generate "several hundred letters" on any given issue, told me that whenever the organization complains, he always looks into the matter, sometimes reading through years' worth of clips. He was quick to assert, however, that "I never find any merit in their allegations." Irvine, Gruson said, is "a very intelligent man" but also "totally political and certainly partisan." All in all, he concluded, "it's a case of a very good mind put to a very bad use—but that's his business."

Whatever Gruson's personal views on Irvine, the fact that he and Sulzberger are willing to receive AIM each year sends a powerful signal to the *Times* newsroom. Two *Times* editors with whom I spoke expressed dismay that the paper's top two executives would take the group so seriously. However, I could find little evidence that their cordiality affected the paper's news operations. Following up on the "Sandinista Debt" report, I talked with two *Times* editorial writers who frequently write about Central America. One had not seen the newsletter. The other said he had glanced at it but had come away "unimpressed." He elaborated, "I find the group so offensive that I don't want to engage it in any way, shape or form." The top editors at the foreign desk had not seen the newsletter either. Foreign editor Warren Hoge told me that he was not ever aware AIM had raised the matter with Sulzberger. More generally, said Hoge, "at our level, no one ever brings AIM up." When I asked deputy foreign editor John Darnton about the AIM newsletter, he replied: "Is that the one with the bull's eye? I don't see it. And I don't imagine I'll start reading it."

The Times's dealings with AIM point up a significant aspect of the group's current relationship with the press: to the extent that AIM retains any influence with the big news organizations, it usually occurs on the executive, as opposed to the working, level. Corporate officials, concerned with public opinion, often seem at pains to keep Reed Irvine happy; journalists tend to be far more skeptical. There is no better illustration of this than at ABC. Of all the news organizations AIM has taken on, not one has been more receptive than ABC. At one annual meeting Roone Arledge told Irvine, "I have great respect for you and your organization." Irvine also praised ABC for being "the only network that employs a conservative commentator."

ABC's most compliant performance came in connection with *The Day After*. In anticipation of the broadcast, AIM asked its members to write 450 companies and warn them of possible repercussions should they advertise on the show. Evidently rattled by this, Anthony Thomopolous, president of the ABC Broadcast Group, telephoned Irvine and offered to arrange a special screening to show him how innocent the film was. Irvine accepted the invitation but, far from being reassured, denounced the network for "handing the Soviets a tremendous propaganda assist." In the end ABC did have problems selling time on the show, with thirty-second spots fetching $100,000 instead of the $135,000 originally expected.

AIM was not through. Prior to ABC's annual meeting in May 1984 the group submitted a resolution expressing concern that the network's facilities had been used to disseminate Soviet propaganda. To prevent such a problem from recurring, the resolution called on management to undertake an investigation into the matter. ABC asked the Securities and Exchange Commission to rule the resolution out of order, but AIM, battling the network at every step, forced the matter to a vote at the shareholder meeting. There the resolution garnered only 3 percent of all shares voted. But AIM's campaign against the network received another, more valuable, payoff. At the meeting Lester Kinsolving, an AIM sidekick, urged ABC to produce a program that would show what would happen to Lawrence, Kansas, in the event of a Soviet takeover. ABC chair Leonard Goldenson's response: "We're not prepared to say at this moment what it is, but in the course of the next year you will find an announcement somewhat along the line you're suggesting." Pressed to be more specific, Goldenson revealed that ABC was planning a series called *Topeka, Kansas . . . USSR*. It would later be renamed *Amerika*.

AIM was exultant. As Irvine wrote in his newsletter:

> Last November, when "The Day After" was being discussed, a lot of us thought that a movie about a Soviet takeover would be an appropriate counterbalance to the nuclear war scenario that ABC was airing. I would not have bet much on the possibility that ABC might actually make such a movie. Someone told me today that if I ever got discouraged I should think of the stonecutter who would hammer a chisel against the rock 99 times with no visible result, but with the 100th blow the stone split. I think our pounding on ABC has paid off.

ABC has steadfastly denied that its decision to produce *Amerika* had anything to do with AIM or any other pressure group. Bob Wright, a spokesman for the network, says that Goldenson "erroneously connected the two projects" at the shareholder meeting. He adds, "In light of AIM's diatribe at that meeting, it's very tempting to consider *Amerika* the flip side of *The Day After*, but in fact that's not the case." Nonetheless, the similarity between the right's suggestions and the program ultimately commissioned by ABC—not to mention the circumstances under which the project was announced—raise strong suspicions that *Amerika* was an act of political damage control.

Still, it would be a mistake to exaggerate AIM's particular influence in the affair. "It's very hard to assess the group's role," says Nicholas Meyer, director of *The Day After*. As he notes, "the entire right wing was mobilized" over the film, including the Conservative Caucus, the American Security Council, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and the Rev. Jerry Falwell, who threatened advertisers with a consumer boycott. The program was so controversial that it became a national political event. In the outpouring of protest over *The Day After*, AIM's voice was loud, but it was only part of a chorus.

Moreover, in assessing ABC's reaction, it's worth remembering that both *The Day After* and *Amerika* are projects of ABC's entertainment division in Los Angeles, rather than the news division in New York. AIM's experience with the latter has been far less cozy. Consider *The Fire Unleashed*. Nine months in the making, the three-hour documentary explored various aspects of the nuclear

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Also, at a time when indifference to racism is at a new high, Christians are playing a pivotal role in protests against U.S. complicity with apartheid. At a time when wars on poverty are out of vogue, Christians are bucking the spirit of the times and increasingly heeding the words of Christ that what we have failed to do for the poor and deprived we have failed to do for Him. Indeed, the Catholic bishops' pastoral on the U.S. economy contends that a basic criterion for evaluating economic policies is their impact on the poor.

Jerry Falwell has attacked the pastoral for coming close to "socialism." Since the bishops have called for beefed-up government programs to aid the poor and for economic democracy (including co-operative ownership of enterprises by workers), it is understandable that Falwell would be upset.

But strangely, few on the Left have noticed all this. Moreover, few realize that the present Pope has called for "the priority of labor over capital" and for workers' ownership and self-management; few are aware that John Paul has been identified as "the first socialist pope" by *Newsweek* and that his economic views have acutely irritated apologists for business; few have paid much attention to the progressive social witness of the Protestant churches; and few are aware of the social change advocacy of Christians in Latin America, South Africa, Poland, the Philippines, and in the European peace movement.

Defenders of corporate or bureaucratic privilege and might-makes-right militarism have every reason to be leery of today's Catholics and Protestants. We at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW (an ecumenical monthly edited by lay Catholics) believe social radicalism is rooted in the gospel, and that Christians are compelled to succor the poor, champion the rights of labor, and quiet the gale winds of war. They are required — for theological and spiritual reasons — to say a decisive "NO!" to the idols of greed, consumerism, power, and national-interest-above-all.

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age: the arms race, nuclear power and the disposal of nuclear waste. In May 1985, ABC held an advance press screening in Washington. Far from offering Irvine a special screening, the news division refused to invite him, maintaining that the event was reserved for journalists writing for publications with a circulation of more than 50,000.

Undaunted, Irvine showed up at the appointed hour and talked his way into the screening. Once the documentary was over and the question period about to begin, however, Pamela Hill, executive producer of ABC's Closeup unit, which had produced the documentary, asked Irvine to step into the lobby. There, Hill told him that because he was a lobbyist rather than a journalist he could not remain for the question period. Irvine became indignant and, his voice rising, insisted that he be allowed to stay. "The volume reached such a pitch that it began to filter inside," says Marshall Frady, the correspondent on the documentary. "It was a sort of shrilling."

The incident was bannered in the next issue of "AIM Report." "ABC News Panics," it declared, asserting that the network had "tried to muzzle the media watchdog." The article went on to bludgeon the documentary itself, describing it as an explicit effort to scuttle the Strategic Defense Initiative and "to further undermine public confidence in the peaceful uses of atomic energy." Readers were urged to write the show's sponsors and complain about their support for such a "deceptive and unfair program." AIM sent a critique to ABC executives and raised the matter at the network's annual meeting.

Robert Siegenthaler, ABC's vice president of news practices, evaluates all AIM complaints. I asked him about Irvine's letter concerning *The Fire Unleashed*. He said it was very vague: "There was no substantiation. It was a blunderbuss approach—'We hate the whole thing.'" Therefore, he said, he didn't find it necessary to consult with the producers of the documentary: "You can't go to a producer and say, 'Would you mind responding to your whole piece?'" In the end, according to Siegenthaler, all AIM got from the episode was "grist for its newsletter."

Following up on that conversation, I talked with the program's correspondent and its three producers. Their comments were remarkably consistent.

Marshall Frady: "Irvine is just a thoroughly ill-bred chap. He's mean-tempered and rancorous, stunningly petty-minded and graceless. He's engaged in a kind of rightist vigilantism."

Phil Lewis, producer of the section on nuclear power (he has since left ABC): "In reality, what he does is turn a lot of people off. He comes on so strong that people don't pay attention to him. He had no effect at all on what I was doing. He's such an ideologue."

John Fielding, producer of the section on nuclear waste: "I didn't see their newsletter. They're kind of a joke as far as I'm concerned."

Steve Singer, co-producer of the section on the arms race: "AIM was a flat-out lobby for the nuclear power industry. They have little to do with criticizing the performance of the press."

The *Fire Unleashed* episode is representative of ABC's overall treatment of AIM. Examining the many charges that AIM has leveled at ABC News over the past year, I could find only one that resulted in any correction by the network. It dealt with a *Good Morning America* report last November on Soviet foreign policy. The segment greatly displeased AIM, which claimed it blurred the inherently aggressive nature of Soviet imperialism. Of the many points it contested, the most concrete was David Hartman's statement that Lenin had "led the revolution that overthrew the czars and began what we know as the Soviet Union." The following week Hartman aired a correction, saying that Lenin was in Switzerland at the time of the revolution and, although the head of the Bolsheviks, had not physically led the uprising. Such was the fruit of a year of AIM's labor.

Unwanted Friend

Nothing sums up AIM's isolation better than the Westmoreland case. From the moment in January 1982 that CBS aired *The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*, AIM was busy trying to discredit the broadcast. Irvine helped Gen. William Westmoreland stage a press conference in Washington, and "AIM Report" devoted an issue to explaining why, as the headline put it, "CBS Should Fire Mike Wallace." In speeches, newspaper columns and radio commentaries, Irvine spread the message that a great American had been defamed. Finally, in September, when Westmoreland announced he was suing CBS for libel, AIM set up a legal aid fund in his behalf. The general was so appreciative that he lent his name to an AIM fund-raising letter. "Without AIM's assistance," the letter quoted Westmoreland as saying, "much of the truth regarding what CBS attempted to do to my reputation may have never come to light."

But AIM's alliance with the general quickly came apart. In January 1983, Van Gordon Sauter, president of CBS News, frustrated by the good press Westmoreland was receiving, delivered a tough speech in Philadelphia. Certain groups, he declared, were engaged in "a search-and-destroy mission against the news media." The Westmoreland case, Sauter asserted, was serving "as a rallying point for people who seek to use it as an instrument for damaging the image, spirit and aggressiveness of the news media." Sauter did not get more specific, but CBS executives later admitted that AIM was one of the groups to which he was referring.

Sauter's remarks gained wide publicity and, in the process, unnerved the Westmoreland camp. Attorney Dan Burt of the Capital Legal Foundation, which was representing Westmoreland, advised the general to distance himself from AIM. Westmoreland promptly informed Irvine that he no longer wanted the group to use his name for fund-raising or other purposes. Not long after, Capital turned down the $35,000 that AIM had raised through its Westmoreland defense fund. The immediate dispute came over Irvine's demand that the foundation provide documentation for how the money was spent; Capital refused, maintaining that it would create excessive paperwork. More important, Capital's lawyers feared that if they took AIM's money, they

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would also have to take its advice. Given AIM's track record, the foundation gladly sacrificed $35,000 rather than submit to second-guessing by Reed Irvine.

The final rupture, however, was yet to come. In July, AIM ran an advertisement in *The Washington Times* saluting its own role in calling attention to CBS's "biased and sloppy" documentary. The ad, which bore a photograph of the general, asked readers to "take Gen. Westmoreland's advice and send us your subscription now." Westmoreland, who had not approved the ad, was furious. In a stinging letter to Irvine, he said he found it "repugnant that you continue to use my name (and in this case, my picture) to further your own ends." The ad, wrote Westmoreland, "adds fuel to the frequent allegations by some that my case is a right-wing effort to 'get' the press." He was making the letter public, he said, because "I cannot, in good conscience, continue to allow you to use my name in such a way." Irvine claimed that the ad had been placed by an AIM staff member without his authorization, but that was to no avail. For the remaining year and a half of the case, AIM was largely forced to sit on the sidelines.

AIM's performance in the Westmoreland affair clinched what the network had suspected all along. "We felt that Irvine attempted to seize on the case as a means of blowing his own horn," says Robert Chandler, who at the time was vice president for news administration. (He has since moved to NBC.) "I don't think he was a key player at all." George Crile, the producer of *The Uncounted Enemy*, observes that "the fact that [Irvine] called himself Accuracy in Media gave him a certain cachet" when he first appeared on the scene. "By the time of the Westmoreland documentary, though, he had long since come to be viewed as a right-wing lobbyist instead of as a media critic." Ira Rosen, a producer for *60 Minutes*, is more succinct. "If the angle of your story is to find AIM's influence," he told me, "I can't help you out."

Mike Wallace has been a recurrent AIM target for years. After "AIM Report" called for his dismissal in 1982, the *60 Minutes* correspondent was sufficiently concerned that he sent Irvine a letter inviting him to lunch. "I don't believe that I'm the irresponsible ogre you paint me," he wrote, "and I doubt you're the calculatedly myopic and biased observer I've come to believe you are. What do you think, should we talk?" After holding on to the letter for more than two months, Irvine refused. As he later explained to *The Washington Times*, he preferred to keep Wallace "at arm's length" so that should he have to call for his dismissal again, he could do so with a clear conscience. Indeed, in 1984, Wallace was again featured in "Air Report," this time under the headline "CBS Should Retire Mike Wallace."

Wallace has seen enough. He told me that although Irvine at first "succeeded in getting everybody's attention, he so persistently overstated his case and shaded the truth that everybody simply began not to take him so seriously."

"The guy calls 'wolf' too often," Wallace continued. "I'm all for accuracy in media, but he's so shrill, so strident. He really seems to be after scalps more than corrections."

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AIM, said Wallace, "has reached the point of diminishing returns."

AIM Vinaigrette

In the course of interviewing dozens of journalists, I found perhaps a handful who had complimentary things to say about AIM. Jay Mathews, the Los Angeles bureau chief of *The Washington Post*, says that AIM is "more of a force for good than for evil." A reader of "AIM Report" for several years, Mathews says he thinks Reed Irvine is "one of the best American polemicists of our era." Mathews, who has sent AIM insignia ties to some *Post* editors, adds that he does regret that the group is so "confrontational" and "leans so far to the right"; nonetheless, he observes, "I know I'm a better reporter, and we're a better newspaper, than if they weren't around."

As Mathews's remarks indicate, even those who support AIM do not take it for anything but a right-wing group. Still, they value its provocative quality, its ability to jolt news organizations out of their complacency. David Marash, the former *20/20* correspondent who now works as an anchorman for WRC-TV in Washington, says of AIM: "I think the specifics of their criticism are frequently wrong—probably more frequently wrong than right. But I'd rather have them around to contribute to a dialogue than to have to put up with the general vapidity of what passes for criticism of TV news."

Is AIM interested in dialogue, though? Or is it interested in administering ideological litmus tests? Consider the experience of William Sheehan. A former president of ABC News, Sheehan earlier this year was chosen by Charles Z. Wick to head Voice of America. His network ties and his current status as a PBS board member, however, made him highly suspect to the Republican right. To help allay their fears, a get-acquainted lunch was arranged. Among those in attendance: James Lucier, an aide to Senator Jesse Helms; Tom Winter and Allan Ryskind, editors at *Human Events*; Richard Viguerie, the right's direct-mail specialist; and Reed Irvine. The lunch did not go well. The conservatives made clear their belief that VOA should serve as an aggressive arm of U.S. foreign policy. When he was questioned on that point, though, Sheehan stood his ground, maintaining that the agency should be run as an objective news operation, free of political bias. Not long after the lunch Helms sent Wick a letter detailing his objections to Sheehan. The nomination was withdrawn.

What role did Irvine play in all of this? Very much a subordinate one, according to Sheehan: "I would not say Reed Irvine alone was a major chain in the link. He's one of the players, but not a lead player." That role was clearly played behind the scenes by Jesse Helms. Interestingly, in a lunch marked by awkward questions, says Sheehan, the single most inappropriate one was put by Irvine: he wanted to know how Sheehan had voted in the last election. Sheehan refused to answer.

The episode helps sum up the extent, and limitations, of AIM's influence. The organization is generally effective when it undertakes efforts in conjunction with like-minded groups. As Sheehan found out, the power of the right to affect the media can be extraordinary, and when AIM joins in such a coalition, its doggedness can help the cause. *The Day After* affair is a good example. Given the outpouring of national protest over the film, AIM's pressure contributed to ABC's overall skittishness.

On its own steam, however, AIM does not get very far. It is simply too strident. Even its natural allies, such as Peter Braestrup, find the group hard to take. A former *Washington Post* correspondent who is currently editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*, Braestrup is the author of *Big Story*, a critique of press coverage of the Vietnam War; he appeared on AIM's documentary about how television helped lose the war. Although he agrees with much of AIM's message, Braestrup says that the organization "gives media criticism a bad name, particularly conservative media criticism." Calling Irvine "his own worst enemy," Braestrup elaborates: "When he stands up at stockholders' meetings and behaves like an activist, it undercuts him so. I don't think Reed Irvine has any effect, because no one in the media takes him seriously."

Smith Hempstone is a former editor in chief of *The Washington Times*. A subscriber to AIM's newsletter, Hempstone says he believes the organization "performs a useful function." However, he adds: "Mr. Irvine has a tendency to go overboard a bit. You do catch more bees with honey than vinegar. There's not too much honey in Reed Irvine." Hempstone himself once tasted AIM's vinegar, during an informal gathering of conservatives in Colorado. Irvine was there, too. Hempstone, who was still at *The Times*, recalls the incident: "One of my editors was a liberal Democrat, which I was aware of when I hired him. But he was also a consummate professional who didn't let his politics interfere with his work." For three full days, Hempstone says, Irvine bugged him about this editor: "He wanted me to get rid of him. I told him I wouldn't do it. It was all nonsense, because he couldn't cite one instance in which the guy's politics had interfered with his reporting." (Irvine acknowledges having brought up the matter but says he doubts that he asked Hempstone to fire the editor.)

Nina Totenberg, legal affairs correspondent for National Public Radio, says she feels some affinity for Accuracy in Media. Her father is an immigrant from Poland and a naturalized American citizen, and she still has relatives "behind the Iron Curtain," as she puts it. "I'm not as naïve as many people are about the 'communist threat,'" she says. "I'm painfully aware of my freedom." A number of years ago, however, Irvine attacked Totenberg for one of her NPR reports, prompting her to write a memorandum in her defense. AIM's criticism was "full of lies," she recalls. "It made my blood curdle."

I asked Totenberg whether AIM's broadsides caused journalists to fear it. "I don't know," she replied. "It's not pleasant to have someone on your case who has no professional values that you share. Their criticisms are so off-the-mark, so ill-informed, so unprofessional, that they can be upsetting. But it's hard to say you fear somebody if you don't have any respect for them." □

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COMMENT

The Real Aim Is Ideological

ALAN WOLFE

Michael Massing is no doubt correct in saying that increased media exposure was enough to do in Reed Irvine. The press is nothing if not faddish, and Irvine is not the kind of man who adjusts easily to changing tastes. Accuracy in Media will, it is safe to say, never be the quasi-public Office of Censorship it has been trying to become.

Yet the real story, to use a favorite journalistic phrase, is not that Irvine has lost influence but that he ever gained it. The man, after all, represents an extreme point of view in a political culture that lusts after the middle position. He is controversial when blandness rules the airwaves. His goal is to limit the freedom of others to say what they believe in a society that, constitutionally at least, respects free speech. He tolerates double standards that would make a Stalinist blush. He has no sense of fair play. He is, in short, a member of what used to be called the lunatic fringe, the kind of man who sees communist conspiracies all around him. Who else would believe, as Irvine says he does, that ABC's decision to broadcast *The Day After* was intended to stir up European opposition to the deployment of American missiles?

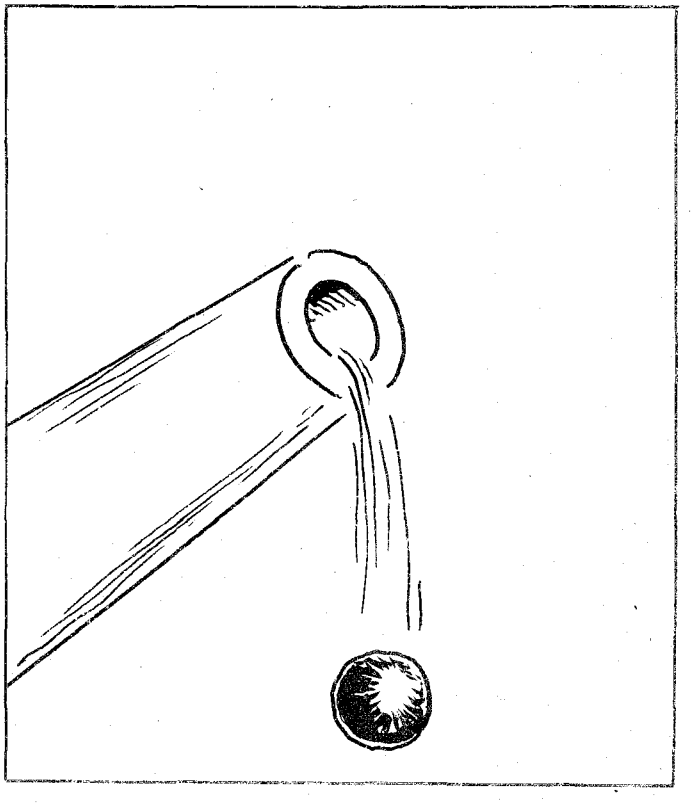
Irvine, who twenty years ago would have been dismissed as a kook by a more self-confident ruling class, has won praise from important people at *The Washington Post*, received the almost royal honor of an annual invitation to meet with the publisher of *The New York Times*, influenced programming at ABC and besmirched, admittedly without destroying, the reputations of a number of first-rate journalists. I cannot imagine anyone on the left being taken that seriously.

Irvine's methods of operation cut across the grain of the communications business in this country in two ways. First, he is predictable and boring—exactly the kind of person that reporters and television producers generally try to avoid. Second, he is a fierce ideological warrior, for whom political controversy is part of a desperate struggle of good against evil. In the latter category he includes the overwhelming majority of those in the United States who make their living in the world of words.

Irvine's molelike predictability, evident in nearly everything he does, is best illustrated by his efforts to expose "disinformation." To counter what he considers the inaccuracy of the establishment media, Irvine publishes the bimonthly "AIM Report." One of the newsletters for May 1985 is typical. In it we learn that the March 29 evening edition of National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* "featured two anti-defense segments, one anti-business segment, two feminist segments and the 'expert' testimony of three left-wing lobbies and think tanks." (Irvine's own experts, called on frequently, rarely appear in quotation marks.) "The same broadcast," Irvine continues, "aired six news updates detailing the latest human rights horrors in South Africa, El Salvador and Chile, favorite targets of the left. There was no news about any human rights problems in any country under communist control."

Irvine is in the habit of watching, reading and counting nearly everything. Yet somehow one always knows what his newsletter will say. Read it once, and it is possible to write every other one that follows. Clearly his purpose is not to provide knowledge but to reinforce what the reader thinks he or she already knows. In that sense Irvine's newsletter is perfect for the way the New Right thinks about ideas. On the one hand, conservatives are engaged in a battle over how we are supposed to think. Yet on the other, most conservatives of Irvine's stripe—certainly the man himself and, my guess is, most of his readers—are anti-intellectual, uncomfortable with the joys of thinking complexly, more interested in answers than questions. The result is a product that is to ideas what television news is to reality: enough of a shadow of the real thing to seem convincing, but packaged in a way so that it never strains one's mental capacities or faith in what one already knows.

Irvine's newsletters also tell people what to do. Most issues contain a section listing the names and addresses of officials to whom Irvine's constituents can write. Irvine's model of political action is borrowed from B.F. Skinner's theory of reinforcement; he lists the companies that advertise products for television or radio programs he does not like, and the reader is supposed to respond reflexively by



Alan Wolfe is a member of The Nation*'s editorial board.*

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complaining to the companies. The political input, like the ideological, is repetitive in the extreme.

For those who find a four-page newsletter too taxing, the organization publishes an annual index to its reports. Here complex subjects are given bumper-sticker slogans, revealing the filters through which AIM sees the world. Thus, the entry for "cancer" reminds the reader of a CBS documentary, *The Politics of Cancer*, that was, according to AIM, characterized by "oversimplification" and "out of context quotes." The National Campfire Girls have been reduced to "one of the organizations distributing lit. for People's Bicentennial Commission." Pete Seeger's entry reads: "Show sponsored by Allied Chemical. Example of anticapitalist song. A faithful servant of communism."

Not only is Reed Irvine something of a bore; he is also engaged in a long-running vendetta against his political opponents. His organization, in my opinion, should be called Harassment in Media.

All I am interested in, Irvine regularly says, is accuracy. If a reporter makes a mistake and if that mistake is covered up by the elitists who run the newspapers and television stations, then my mission is, to the best of my ability, to publicize the mistake and ask for a correction. I am a public watchdog, protecting the truth.

Whether or not one agrees with Irvine's conception of his job depends on how one defines truth and accuracy. The following example illustrates Irvine's definition.

Richard Threlkeld of ABC is reporting in 1984. He tells of a child covered with scales and marred by physical deformities, born in Saigon. This baby, continues Threlkeld, was living in a shack near the airport, "where the U.S. planes usually dumped their left-over Agent Orange before landing." The mother "and tens of thousands of other Vietnamese civilians who had Agent Orange dumped on them will not be compensated."

According to Irvine, Threlkeld should win a prize for "outrageous reporting." The story, he says, is "an excellent example of disinformation." Yet Irvine does not deny that Air Force planes dumped Agent Orange; he simply points out that they were under enemy fire when they did so and claims that they always dumped it in the jungle. He does admit that on at least two occasions they dumped it on takeoff because of engine problems. Nor does Irvine have any proof that Threlkeld invented the baby: "Threlkeld's information about the 'little devil' was probably no more accurate than his misinformation about the dumping." By Irvine's own admission, therefore, Threlkeld's story is quite possibly true. Irvine has not a single piece of concrete information to prove it false. Why, then, does Threlkeld deserve a disinformation award?

The answer has nothing to do with what Threlkeld said; rather, it pertains to what he did not say. Irvine, it turns out, has strong, even obsessive, views about Agent Orange. He is convinced that the stories about the chemical are fabricated by communist sympathizers to undermine America's national security. To be classified as accurate, a story on Agent Orange must conform in all particulars to Irvine's views about it. If it does not, even by omission, then it is false.

Agent Orange is not the only subject on which Reed Irvine has strong opinions; his opinions on almost every subject are strong. *The Day After*, for example, depicts the aftermath of nuclear war, yet a nuclear war has never occurred. One would think that a hypothetical situation could be neither accurate nor inaccurate, but Irvine calls the film inaccurate because it does not mention Soviet disinformation tactics. With the same logic, Irvine has suggested that *The Day After* may have been produced because the Soviet Union planted a spy in ABC. "We do not know whether or not there are [spies] within the bowels of ABC, but neither does ABC's management," he writes. "It would be naive to suggest that this is an absolute impossibility." Anything short of an absolute impossibility is a possibility, and not to mention a possibility is inaccurate.

There is, in other words, a script in Irvine's head, any deviation from which is an inaccuracy. Because he is passing judgment on ideas, not facts, his is a test for heresy, not accuracy. Take, for example, this criticism of Sydney Schanberg: "If Sydney Schanberg did not set out to undermine American support for the anti-communist government of Cambodia under Lon Nol, he gave a very good imitation of doing so." Those who read Schanberg's dispatches may wonder what is going on here, for he wrote eloquently about the horrors of the Khmer Rouge takeover of that country. Irvine's point is that he did not stress communist atrocities enough. In one article, Irvine points out, Schanberg did not mention Khmer Rouge tactics until the thirteenth paragraph of a nineteen-paragraph article. So Schanberg's inaccuracy comes down to an editorial disagreement. His dispatches presumably would have been accurate if he had written them in the order of emphasis that Reed Irvine preferred.

To see back-to-back *Vietnam*, the thirteen-part series televised on PBS in 1983, and AIM's filmed response, broadcast two years later, is to realize the issues at stake. This is not a debate between one position and another; it is a contrast between education and ideology. The one product is deeply researched, thoughtful in its assumptions and detached in its analysis. The other is agitprop, dealing very little with the Vietnam War itself but charging a communist effort to take over the world. To elevate Irvine's effort to the same symbolic level as the original program is not to strike a balance; it is to confess that one has lost all standards and is no longer capable of saying that history is meaningful.

Irvine's work is, in the last analysis, not about politics at all. If his aim were to contrast a conservative point of view with a liberal one, to sponsor a debate between two ways of reading history, his efforts would contribute to a mature and intelligent understanding of the American condition. But it is precisely that intellectual debate that is missing from his work. Unable to do anything about communism in Cambodia, Irvine attacks Schanberg instead. Helpless to reverse the North's victory in Vietnam, he can nevertheless win the battle over how the war is interpreted in the United States. These controversies are not about the left and right; they are about reality and fantasy. Irvine's objective is to substitute wishes and dreams for a historical reality he re-

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fuses to accept. In that sense his work is cultural, psychological, mythical—dealing with the world as it should be.

This, then, is the true measure of Reed Irvine's success: far from having shifted the political debate from left to right, he has changed the nature of the debate from one that respected reality to one that argues about whether it ever existed. On many issues that might arise in the United States, there would seem to be two positions: one is held by most people who know something about the subject; the other is held by Reed Irvine and his friends. These two positions, in Irvine's view, need to be given equal weight. It does not matter that the former position is based on reasoned skepticism and a sensitivity to historical fact, while the latter position is emotional, ideological and fact-resistant.

The American people, it is fair to say, have traditionally been weak on history; their understanding of other cultures also leaves something to be desired. More than almost any other people, Americans project their perspectives on the world. Loren Baratz was quite correct to suggest, in his book *Backfire*, that the Vietnam War represented the ultimate point in our effort to force the world to conform to our cultural assumptions. After the war was over, there were signs that Americans were beginning to see the world from outside the traditional framework. Irvine is pointing the way to where we were before the war, convinced that in any conflict between historical reality and our own fantasies, the latter must always take precedence over the former.

How are we to explain Reed Irvine's success, his ability to interpose himself between the American people and their interpretation of what happens in the world? Three facts are obvious and require no further comment: Americans distrust, if not actively despise, the media, giving prima facie legitimacy to any media critic; the country has moved right, and a host of organizations once thought of as somewhat loony are now respectable; and Reed Irvine himself is a man of unflagging energy, whose devotion to detail and seriousness of purpose are impressive. But because the mass media are embedded in our culture—representing nothing less than the way we choose to present ourselves to the world and inform ourselves of how the world understands us—I would rather emphasize certain underlying cultural reasons for Irvine's success.

Americans are an ideological people, who filter their information about the world through unexamined assumptions. Unlike most ideologies, Americanism is implicit, even subliminal. This country shuns overt propaganda, which is why people have difficulty responding to Reed Irvine; few understand how to resist him.

Irvine's ideology begins with the name of his organization. As I have suggested, Irvine's objective is to propagate right-wing views; accuracy per se has little to do with the matter. When he talks to his friends, such as the editors of *National Review*, he proudly identifies his interests as conservative. When he confronts the general public, as he did in hearings before the House Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy in 1975, he says: "AIM is an organization

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K.A.L. 007: Unanswered Questions

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that is careful in what it says; it is not trying to propagandize, it is simply correcting errors."

Anyone interested in improving the press would, one assumes, favor freedom for it; the best test of accuracy is an open competition among ideas. Does Reed Irvine believe in freedom of the press? "One of the key principles of our society," he informed the same subcommittee, "is that free and robust debate should be encouraged." But he explained to the October 1976 Missouri Press Convention: "Freedom of the press is not an end in and of itself. . . . There is some reason to question whether or not we have gone too far for our own good." Irvine recommends that no one should have the right to "weaken the will to resist and arm ourselves against foreign enemies of our freedom" or to "promote decadence and depravity in our society." Positively speaking, the press, in his view, is obligated to "tell the truth about totalitarian countries," to "expose relentlessly the true motives and intentions of those individuals and groups in this country who are working to undermine and destroy our freedom" and to "help us maintain some perspective, not dwelling so much on the flaws in our society that our young people lose sight of our virtues." That Irvine's words sound like a translation of a statement from the Soviet Union of Journalists is an irony no doubt lost on him.

Most people, including media executives, have interests other than correct ideology. Particularly in television, where those who make the decisions are ambitious, mobile, apolitical and possessed of as short an attention span as their audience, Irvine's relentless ideology is difficult to counter. You cannot win an argument with an ideologue like Irvine; you can only search for a way that will satisfy him for a while.

One way to illustrate the depth of Irvine's ideological commitment is to compare him with William F. Buckley Jr. Whatever else may be said of Buckley, he is whimsical and cosmopolitan. Just for the heck of it, he wrote a column in 1982 telling conservatives that the movie *Reds* could be fun to see. Out came Reed Irvine: "It isn't often that one sees William F. Buckley and the *Daily World*, the organ of the Communist Party, USA, in agreement." Warren Beatty, said Irvine the film critic, "did not take the opportunity to put the Russian Revolution in the proper perspective, showing that young idealists such as John Reed had helped foist upon the Russian people (and ultimately upon millions of others) the most tyrannical, oppressive economic and political system known to the world in modern times." Irvine never relaxes, not even at the movies.

His ideological relentlessness helps him against those inexperienced in the arts of political warfare. It gives him a second advantage as well, one that is a matter of temperament. If Reed Irvine had an enemies list, prominent on it, judging by the number of times he criticizes them, would be a gang of four: Dan Rather, Bill Moyers, Tom Wicker and Anthony Lewis. I cannot speak for Rather, but as far as the other three are concerned, one striking difference between them and Irvine is that they are capable of introspection.

By introspection I mean the courage to admit that one was wrong, not about this or that fact but about one's interpretation of how the world works. The Enlightenment bequeathed a double legacy: one is committed to a point of view, to be sure, but one is also committed to respect thought processes that compel one to change that point of view when new evidence demands it. The best journalists in this country are those who are committed to reason in both means and ends. Reed Irvine is not. He does not accept the principle that new conclusions should follow from contradictory evidence. The difference between Bill Moyers and Reed Irvine is not simply that one is liberal and the other conservative, though that is obviously true. It is a difference between humility and arrogance, between a belief in exploration and discovery and a need for reiteration and reconfirmation.

I have yet to see humility from Reed Irvine; as far as I can tell, he has never admitted being wrong. When he spots a weakness in his antagonist, he jumps in immediately. The unfortunate Janet Cooke, who invented a story about a child heroin addict for *The Washington Post*, was grist for Irvine's mill. He wrote an analysis for *The Saturday Evening* Post saying that Cooke's fabrication "doesn't begin to compare . . . with the Post's three-year cover-up of the genocide in Cambodia . . . ," and filled his newsletter with statements about how the affair confirmed what he had been saying all along about the newspaper's methods.

Then there was the matter of Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who shot the Pope. As one might expect, Irvine subscribes to the Claire Sterling theory that the K.G.B. and the Bulgarians are responsible for the attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II. Yet when Agca went crazy at his Rome trial, the attention of the newsletter turned elsewhere. If Irvine ever publicly reflects on the Agca case and concludes that the Central Intelligence Agency is capable of using the same disinformation tactics as the K.G.B., I will retract my negative comparisons of him with Bill Moyers.

There are leftists, including some who write for this magazine, who are as monochromatic in ideology as Reed Irvine. There are conservatives who are open to new ideas. I am glad to see Irvine on television, for I think it is better to have committed people with unusual notions on the air than to have general blandness. But especially on television, where deliberation, retrospection and complexity are shunned in favor of certainty and promptness, I fear that a Reed Irvine inevitably encourages his ideological opponents to act exactly as he does. In the hothouse world of television, the only effective response to ideological certainty is ideological certainty. I am not persuaded that two polarized camps hurling epithets at each other offer the best prospect for enlightenment. Irvine's greatest victory would be to reduce the left to his own level of ideological propaganda.

A final factor that helps account for Irvine's success is the ambiguous ownership of the electronic media in the United States. In contrast to Europe, where television tends to be either a government monopoly or closely regulated, American networks are privately owned and rely on advertisers for revenue. Private sponsorship can easily be manipulated for ideological ends. During the McCarthy period, a publication called *Red Channels* compiled an unofficial but highly effective blacklist. Advertisers were

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casually threatened with controversy if they sponsored programs featuring those who had been "exposed" in *Red Channels*, and many companies, hesitant to antagonize the right, complied by dropping their sponsorship.

Reed Irvine clearly has *Red Channels* in the back of his mind. He regularly asks his readers to write to sponsors of programs he does not like. In February 1985, Irvine had so many complaints about two CBS films—one on Robert Kennedy, the other on the Atlanta child murders—that he divided all the advertisers on those programs into groups and asked readers whose names began with the letters from *A* to *E* to write to Group 1, and so on through the alphabet. About once every two months Irvine asks his readers to put pressure on the sponsors.

There is nothing new or original about Irvine's Red-baiting. Anyone who links William Buckley with the Communist Party obviously cannot help himself; for such a person, Red-baiting is not a strategy but a reflex. If Sydney Schanberg speaks before the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, Irvine is quick to identify it as a communist organization. Irvine cannot mention Bella Abzug without citing her membership in left-wing organizations all the way back to 1944.

But if Irvine is willing to rely on private ownership to obtain his ends, he is also dependent on government regulation. Even though Irvine castigates government intervention in the market, he is no libertarian. He had no scruples, for example, about accepting public funding for his Vietnam rebuttal. He has also been extremely active in defending the Federal Communications Commission and the fairness rule against efforts by the Reagan Administration to deregulate television.

Consider what broadcasting would be like if the media were completely unregulated, subject only to the whims of the market. It would feature only the lowest-common-denominator appeals for profit, eliminating all programs on politics and all documentaries except those on Joan Collins. Without a broadcasting commitment to public service programming, inspired by government interest, there would be nothing for Reed Irvine to criticize. Little wonder, then, that Irvine comes regularly to the defense of the F.C.C.

There is, however, a happy ending, albeit an ironic one. Irvine has fought strenuously to get certain points of view on television, but the experts now tell us that with so many new kinds of technology available, many viewers never watch a program to the end but switch around every couple of minutes. If Reed Irvine has been stopped, in short, it is not because the left fought back or because the owners of the media had a sudden rush of decency. The only force capable of stopping Reed Irvine has been the apathy, boredom and short attention span of those who prefer *Dynasty* to anything either Reed Irvine or I have to say. □

TO ORDER ADDITIONAL COPIES OF
THE RISE AND DECLINE OF ACCURACY IN MEDIA
USE THE NATION REPRINT MART COUPON ON PAGE 217.

BEAT THE DEVIL.

(*Continued From Page 199*)

Guatemala, the government and armed forces of Nicaragua do not kill political prisoners, who include captured *contra* soldiers. A more detached observer than the league might take it as a plus that in the period the Salvadoran security forces, backed by the United States, indulged in some 50,000 political killings, the Nicaraguan government made it a policy to take prisoners rather than murder *contras* and their supporters. But the league chooses to regard the very taking of prisoners as an infraction of human rights.

Consonant with this approach, the league maintains that the Nicaraguan church has every legal right to challenge the government of the country. Aware that even a careless reader would conclude that at some point a church may transgress a legal line—e.g., by actively counseling desertion or draft resistance—the league distorts recent Nicaraguan church history in this regard, carefully suppressing the church magazine *Iglesia*'s active appeal to Nicaraguans to avoid the draft, or similar actions on the part of the Nicaraguan Catholic hierarchy.

A *Nation* editorial last week demonstrated the league's exaggerations by a factor of two or three of the number of political prisoners in Nicaragua. To give one example of Shea's deceptions, the report's text refers to "representatives of relief agencies with access to the regular prisons"; in her *New Republic* article of September 1 these representatives shrink to "a representative of an international relief agency"—in fact, the International Committee of the Red Cross, whose figures she grossly misrepresents in both cases.

The wildness of the league's numbers accelerates as the report progresses, with figures like "hundreds" and "thousands" tossed in with no supporting evidence. Nowhere is this rhetoric more evident than in the section on "torture." The report invokes "patterns of abuse" and "methods of torture," which duly translated into headlines in the U.S. press. Rape, hooding and immersion are cited as among the "patterns" and "methods of torture reported by Nicaraguan prisoners." To take just these three types of abuse, what is the evidence produced? There is one citation from the C.P.D.H. of a rape. If true, that rape was an outrage, but it does not become a "pattern" of torture in Nicaraguan prisons any more than the one claimed case by the league of torture through immersion in water or the one allegation of a hooding.

Primed with its grab bag of rumor and unsubstantiated assertions, the league team raced back to the United States to inject its report into the *contra* debate. In Senate testimony on March 4, Leiken invoked the league's investigation, exaggerating even its bogus numbers, as evidence of Sandinista disregard for human rights, even though the report was not to be published for another four months. The league made no effort to dissociate itself from this overt recruitment of its reputation to the cause of *contra* aid—unsurprisingly, since that was plainly its animating motive in this seamy episode in the history of human rights investigations.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Truth, Power, Consequences

JACKSON LEARS

IMAGE WORLDS: Corporate Identities at General Electric. *By David Nye. M.I.T. Press. 188 pp. $20.*

ADVERTISING THE AMERICAN DREAM: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940. *By Roland Marchand. University of California Press. 448 pp. $35.*

Two old cartoons from *Collier's* magazine signify a fundamental shift in American attitudes toward advertising. The first, from 1911, shows a newspaper editor cowering at his desk while a subhuman labeled "Big Business" looms over him, brandishing a club marked "Advertising." In the second, which appeared fifteen years later, the editor and the subhuman have disappeared; advertising is now a comely youth distributing a cornucopia of goods to a grateful world.

Despite the vagaries of the business cycle, the second cartoon has characterized discussion of advertising's cultural impact for the past fifty years. It is now considered unsophisticated to say that dependence on advertising revenues has encouraged the culture's self-censorship and promoted assumptions congenial to the world view of the master corporations. The very suggestion elicits a sneer and accusations of paranoia; examples are adduced to show how "the media" refused to cave in when confronted with this or that instance of corporate malfeasance. But the problem is subtler than the application of pressure on specific issues. It involves a process so deeply ingrained in our culture as to be almost lost to consciousness: a fundamental agreement on definitions of "responsible opinion" or "good taste"; an implicit acceptance of the boundaries that demarcate permissible debate. As an oblique but essential expression of concentrated corporate power, advertising has had a special role in creating definitions of reality and normality.

This idea has not informed much criticism of advertising, which has been dominated instead by charges that it is a wasteful way of distributing goods and a sinister method of manipulating behavior. Neither charge is easily proven; both have provoked countercharges that the critics are too puritanical to enjoy the pleasures of a consumer economy. While that assertion overlooks the lack of genuine leisure under advanced capitalism, it does have some historical point. In a sense the critics are puritanical with respect to language as well as goods, and their critique of advertising as mass deception stems in part from a long Anglo-American tradition of puritan plain speech.

English Puritans and their ideological descendants on both sides of the Atlantic were afflicted by what Melville called "the terrible doubt of appearances." When the basis for salvation shifted from outward experience (works) to inner being (faith), the authenticity of appearances became a central spiritual quandary; possibilities for deception (and self-deception) multiplied. The Puritan assault on the theater was part of a broader revulsion from theatricality in social relationships.

By the early nineteenth century, theatricality, magic and moneymaking were entwined in the Anglo-American imagination. The earliest national advertiser in the United States was the patent medicine man, a specialist in street theater who skillfully spoke to longings for magical self-transformation. Yet the doubt of appearances persisted and intensified as urban anonymity spread. Popular fiction was filled with shifty-eyed confidence men, eager to gull the chuckleheaded farm boys crowding into nineteenth-century cities. Victorian moral philosophy provided an antidote to despair. By implanting a "moral sense" in every human breast, Victorian moralists opened the way to a dream of social transparency: a society where people meant what they said and said what they meant. The ideal of perfect sincerity fit well with other Victorian values: a literalist devotion to fact, a simple sense of self. All were (at least in part) cultural strategies to channel and control the flood of deceptive appearances unleashed by a developing market society.

The plain-spoken critique of advertising (and other forms of propaganda) ought not to be lightly dismissed. For all their epistemological naïveté, plain speakers from Sherwood Anderson to George Orwell have raised profound philosophical questions about the relationship between truth and illusion, authenticity and artifice. How are visions of reality constructed in modern society? Do we need to embrace positivist notions of language and reality to criticize the fantastic constructions of advertisers? To observe that corporate advertising is intertwined with a structure of unequal power relations is to recast those problems, not solve them. But the observation does help clarify what is at stake in the debate: the survival of a democratic culture.

For the last decade or so, social scientists and semioticians have advanced the debate about advertising's cultural significance by unraveling many of the mysteries of mass-produced images. But very few of these people have been concerned with the ways in which modern corporations have exercised power over meaning-production. One of the many strengths of David Nye's *Image Worlds* is that he keeps questions of power sharply in focus without losing sight of the larger epistemological issues. He never forgets how slippery and elusive the very notion of "reality" can be.

This remarkable book focuses on what seems to be a narrow subject: the uses of photography at General Electric from 1890 to 1930. The mastery of modern photographic techniques constituted a powerful weapon of social interpretation; G.E. and other corporations possessed it long before any other institutions. With the emerging visual culture of the early twentieth century, corporate control of image production meant that business's vision of reality could be more compellingly presented than any alternative visions.

Nye shows how G.E. packaged a different set of images for each of several audiences: its engineers, workers, executives, consumers and the various publics poised to vote on the issue of public ownership of utilities. The earliest images of workers are from the 1890s, when production was still mostly performed by small, decentralized

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Jackson Lears is the author of No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920 *(Pantheon). He is working on a history of the relationships between American advertising and American culture.*

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groups. From time to time, workers took snapshots of each other. There is nothing "official" about these images. They reveal the persistence of an older culture of independent male artisans—a sly grin here, an indolent slouch there. The few pictures of women workers, who were confined to low-paying, unskilled jobs, predictably show them in submissive postures. Then for a time the workers disappear from company publications, only to return in 1917 in *Works News*, a house organ designed for the "re-education" of the blue-collar work force. At this point there is no longer anything independent in their poses. They are represented as members of the artificial shop floor communities manufactured by the corporation—the company athletic teams or Americanization classes. Men and women alike are subjected to a systematic "cancellation of personality" (at least on film), with hardly a hair out of place or a dirty face. With executives, the management problem was different: it was not a matter of replacing spontaneous solidarity with corporate "community" but of fostering tribal loyalty to the company among competitive go-getters. To that end, executives were packed off to summer camps, where they were stripped to the waist, forced to wear replicas of Roman helmets (or other inspirational costumes) and required to perform solemn rituals of fealty to the firm. The photographic record of these absurdities makes clear why the rites long remained shrouded in secrecy.

All that is enormously entertaining and ingeniously argued; but there is more to Nye's book than a revealing case study. Without the heavy breathing that usually accompanies interdisciplinary enterprises, he smoothly integrates semiotic theory with economic and cultural history. The result is the most sophisticated book on photography as historical artifact that I have yet seen. *Image Worlds* illuminates the history of photography as well as the major issues surrounding the study of mass culture in modern America. And it does so in lucid and spare prose.

Nye's governing assumption is that the rise of the modern corporation signaled a decisive break in cultural history. Historians of the twentieth century, he argues, need a new set of lenses to understand an unprecedented situation. In words that should be memorized by every student of "popular culture," Nye writes:

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It is legitimate to assume that Jacksonian politics, revivalist religion, American landscape painting, and the literary renaissance of the 1850s defined a cultural moment and to treat these varied materials as independent parts that cohere. But it is not possible to survey the forms of mass culture in the twentieth century with the same assumptions. The corporation creates patterns of meaning wholesale and sells them to the public. It divides society into markets while ignoring fundamental divisions between workers and white-collar personnel, between regions, and between ethnic groups. The forms of mass culture, including world's fairs, magazines, advertising, corporate photography, commercial radio and television, and public relations, present a systematically controlled image of American society. These forms of communication and the large companies that control them must be linked in any investigation.

That dramatic departure from earlier patterns of culture makes it ridiculous to speak of "popular culture" in any but a narrow quantitative sense. Nevertheless the honorific aura of "popular" lingers, implying a culture that is democratically created. Nothing could be more misleading, and nothing could be more futile than a study of modern mass culture that fails to consider the intentions of its corporate creators.

It is hard to be sanguine about prospects for democratic debate in a society where huge hierarchical organizations exercise such vast control over ideas and information. Nye, with his emphasis on the supply side of cultural production, may exaggerate the extent of corporate control. Popular traditions of skepticism and suspicion of authority still flourish. But the very nature of choice has become problematic in the image world of contemporary public discourse.

In the end, Nye's focus on a single corporation's multiple strategies leads to a perplexing conclusion. The meanings manufactured by G.E. contradicted each other; the various audiences received sharply varying images of the corporation. The overall ideological effect, says Nye, was mystification, unintelligibility: "The corporation became an ungraspable interplay of conflicting truths, each of which it validated." That captures the confusion in the minds of G.E. managers, but it also puts the specialized audiences of employees on a par with the much wider audiences of consumers and voters. Because he is inside the whale, Nye loses some sense of proportion. Leaving aside the in-house communications and allowing for internal confusions and tensions, one can still see that G.E.'s representations of itself to the broader society constituted a coherent world view.

The persuasive power of that world view intensified as it melded with the social visions created by other advertisers for public consumption. Roland Marchand explores this wider image world in *Advertising the American Dream*, and he finds a number of themes common to the outlook of a small, homogeneous and influential sector: the advertising industry. Marchand's book is an extraordinarily thorough and thoughtful portrait of advertising as a cultural institution. He confines his study to the brief but critical period, 1920–1940, when the ad business experienced a manic rise and depressive fall. Like admen themselves, Marchand is inclined to overlook antecedents: some of the strategies he locates in the 1910s and 1920s were well established decades earlier by patent medicine entrepreneurs. But in general this is the best available study of the moment when national advertising came to maturity.

Marchand emphasizes the insulation of New York advertising people. By comparison with the general population, even midlevel copywriters were extraordinarily well off. And cultural style was as important as money. Those men (only a handful were women) were educated at Ivy League colleges; they hired maids and chauffeurs, played golf, dressed for dinner, endured many nights at the opera. Confusing sleek metropolitan style with intellectual capacity, they cultivated an air of bemused contempt for the "masses" they were trying to reach. Despite the growing popularity of market research, most advertising was based on mythic encounters with "the consumer" at Coney Island or in Macy's basement. The masses (it was assumed) were "feminine" in their emotionalism and passivity; like many theorists of public opinion, admen projected their prejudices onto their vision of crowd behavior.

Professionalism reinforced social insulation. In his feverish pursuit of professional status, the admaker played to three audiences: the mass of consumers, whom he held in contempt; the client, whom he had to please whether or not he held him in contempt; and "a narrow circle of fellow conspirators"—his professional peers—on whom he depended for his self-esteem and the recognition of his craftsmanship. Haunted by the ephemerality of his craft, the adman repeatedly invoked the litany of "risk" and "adventure" to legitimate the high-pressure working conditions in the big agencies. Yet the emphasis on risk reinforced the feeling that advertising was an unreal "game." The panoply of professionalism—the Harvard awards, the trade journals, the in-jokes and specialized jargon—all helped to keep camaraderie high and the specter of unreality at bay.

The ads themselves fell into recurring patterns, which Marchand skillfully sorts out. Social tableaux presented "the little woman" as "general purchasing agent" and the businessman as generic man. "Typical consumers" wore coats and ties, accepted the fluttering attentions of French maids and could often be seen in evening clothes, whether at the theater or clustered round the living room Victrola. This bizarre vision of U.S. class structure was a clear projection of the admen's own narrow social experience. Of course most people didn't live this way, they admitted, but "everyone" wanted to. This class- and culture-bound parochialism has afflicted advertising down to the present.

The pattern of projection was especially apparent during the Depression. For all their affluence, agency staffs were hit hard by the crash; even the high rollers had to cut back their standard of living; many midlevel agency people were out of work for years. The Depression also brought a brasher, tabloid style to advertising. As competition intensified, copywriters strained to touch the bottom of mass taste, provoking a genteel reaction by mid-decade.

Yet the Great Parables of advertising persisted in fair or foul weather. The First Impression showed young men's chances for success in business or romance ruined by dandruff or floppy socks; the Captivated Child popularized breakfast cereals and milk supplements as aids to a new kind of childrearing which was manipulative rather than authoritative; the Democracy of Goods reassured its audience that even the economically humble could afford "the dentifrice of the rich"; and Civilization Redeemed promised that the product would restore primitive virtue to a civilization gone soft in the teeth (or elsewhere)

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without sacrificing the benefits of modernity. The desire to have one's cake and eat it too formed the ambiguities in the consumption ethic: objects and even consumers themselves (when properly outfitted) were displayed as numinous icons, yet the ads often featured nonconsumption activities, such as picking wildflowers or reading to children.

This apparent ambivalence leads Marchand to argue that the advertisement had the unintended therapeutic function of "easing the transition to modernity" for an anxious audience caught between two worlds. The observation is apt, but a difficulty lies in the vagueness of the term "modernity." Advertisements, Marchand notes, created fictitious personal advisers who offered "sympathetic advice on how to triumph over the impersonal judgments of the modern world." Yet it was not the "modern world" that was passing judgment but the dominant culture that advertising helped to create. Here, as elsewhere in recent scholarship, the idiom of "modernity" provides a convenient framework for avoiding the dread word "capitalism."

Marchand is on firmer ground, though, in discussing the broader cultural significance of the Great Parables. He acknowledges that they were "narrow, non-ideological merchandising tactics," not a conspiratorial attempt to impose values on the audience. Nevertheless they had a crucial consequence: they

> did facilitate the spread of those subtle reformulations of old ideas and values endorsed by the most "modern" segment of the population. Frequent reiteration of each parable by a number of advertisers gave the pattern of thinking it embodied such an aura of inevitability that fundamentally different points of view became increasingly difficult to imagine. . . . Popularized for a widening audience, the parables acquired the status of social clichés—notions with the quality of "givens" that established the ideological framework within which other ideas would be explored.

This is really the heart of the matter. Marchand has identified some features of the ideological framework that continues to shape our public discourse: the presentation of the commodity itself as a cure for the ills created by a commodity system; the concealment of production processes behind a glittering cornucopia of goods; the redefinition of democracy in terms of equal access to the dominant styles of consumption. These rhetorical strategies have become so deeply embedded in our habits of thought that they are barely noticeable; yet they have left our public life shrouded in unreality, our "responsible" opinion makers unable to grapple with questions of power.

Marchand has illuminated major themes in modern consumer culture, but important questions remain regarding the origins and development of that culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a sense, there are many links between the commercial theatricality of the patent medicine era and the later, more systematic manufacture of appearances. The same hocus-pocus serves the same distracting purpose, relaxing the tensions at the basis of market exchange. Yet the social location of commercial magicians has shifted. In the nineteenth century, longings for magical transformation and transcendence were met by marginal figures, outsiders who brought to village life a whiff of the carnivalesque, a dose of the exotic. The corporatization of advertising and the drive for professional status transformed the outsider into an insider. Exoticism in advertising imagery declined, yielding prominence to the immediate and familiar. Rather than multiplying fragments of meaning, as nineteenth-century entrepreneurs had done, twentieth-century corporations assembled those fragments into a standardized vision of the good life. As control over commercial image production was consolidated in fewer hands, the centrifugal movement of meanings in the market was slowed. Far from promoting cultural diversity, the modern corporation revived the dream of the Victorian moralist: the setting of cultural meaning in a single mold—not as a result of conspiratorial collusion, but as a byproduct of many merchandising tactics that evoked a common image world in pursuit of rivalrous ends.

There are also some philosophical issues that Marchand might have raised. How, for example, does one locate a critical stance that recognizes truth as a criterion for evaluating manufactured meanings but does not embrace a literalist epistemology? The puritanical plain speaker continues to haunt the debate over advertising. The most powerful critique of the plain-speech tradition has

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come not from the current "poststructuralist" wave, but from early modernist writers like Conrad and Ibsen, who recognized that the self was neither as simple nor as benign as the Victorian faith in moral sense had held, and that the quest for social transparency could have calamitous consequences. The authentic self, with all the manufactured appearances stripped away, could be a horror. But if we have civilization in order not to die of the truth, that does not mean that all cultural forms are equally benign deceptions. Even at the height of postmodern fashion, when attempts to make discriminating judgments are stigmatized as "elitist," cultural critics still face a central problem: to decide when a particular form or interpretive tradition engages the actualities of human experience, and when it merely trivializes or evades them. □

The Memory Hole

ELIZABETH EWEN

PRESENTING THE PAST: Essays on History and the Public. *Edited by Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig. Temple University Press. 424 pp. $34.95. Paper $14.95.*

We are constantly bombarded with disembodied images of the past.

§ Commercials for *The Wall Street Journal* use sepia images of turn-of-the-century immigrants. America, *The Journal* assures us, is the land of opportunity. History is a triumphant journey from Mulberry Street to Wall Street.

§ The Chase Manhattan Bank, again in sepia, shows us the story of a young black girl who saved up her pennies in the 1940s to buy her poor mother a refrigerator. Her thrift paid off; she grew up to be a banker.

§ A television documentary on Teddy Roosevelt is promoted as "histortainment," "history with a wallop and a heart."

§ Articles and advertisements proclaim that "the sixties are back." Cleansed and domesticated, these sixties are all about style, from miniskirts to the Monkees.

§ The May 25 corporate media event, Hands Across America, enjoined people to "Be a Part of History."

§ With Rambo, Hollywood wins the Vietnam War.

In common lingo the phrase "He's history" has become shorthand for disappearing. Perhaps the vernacular reveals a larger truth. Meaningful history has all but vanished from public life, and in its place we have a succession of images tuned to the interests of commerce. The growth industry of the 1980s is historical amnesia.

In such a context, the appearance of *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, co-edited by Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig, is particularly welcome. Most academic historians seem content to bury themselves in esoteric data and debate, rarely looking beyond their desks to consider what institutions and beliefs shape the popular perceptions of history that their students bring to the classroom. The eighteen essays here go beyond the confines of academic discourse to explore how history fares in the cultural marketplace of American life.

The first part of the book, titled "Packaging the Past," offers a sobering look at presentations of history percolating in the society at large. Commercial history magazines, historical fiction, children's books, Hollywood films and TV docudramas serve as examples. Michael Frisch's challenging essay, "The Memory of History," discusses how the mass media and the political establishment combine to erase disturbing aspects of the past (like the trauma of the Vietnam War) and substitute deliberately constructed myths. Roy Rosenzweig looks at these illusions as presented in *American Heritage* magazine and demonstrates how the rough edges of social conflict are glossed over. Edward Countryman's analysis of *Drums Along the Mohawk* (John Ford, 1939) shows how Hollywood turned a subtle novel into a formulaic Western appealing to prejudices about Native Americans and women. Priscilla Murolo examines the evolution of Howard Fast's novels from his popular-front days in *Freedom Road* to his present immigrant sagas, which celebrate only those who rise from rags to riches.

Perhaps the best article in the collection is Gertrude Fraser and Reginald Butler's "Anatomy of a Disinterment," which discusses the uses of history in a small Virginia town where two groups of whites quarreled over an abandoned graveyard. One group said the cemetery was the resting place of the town's plantation-owning ancestors and should be restored. The other group opposed restoration, on the ground that those buried there were only anonymous black slaves. In the macabre debate that ensued, we see how racism still tends to be the animating force in the presentation of Southern history.

The dominant historical myths in the United States today have their own history, which stretches back to the turn of the century, a period of crisis in the development of corporate capitalism. In his essay "Visiting the Past," Michael Wallace suggests that before the late nineteenth century most upper-class Americans had little regard for history. They were too busy discarding the restrictions of their European past: Europe was "history," America was the "virgin land." By the 1880s the growth and consolidation of industrial capitalism had produced not only power and fortune but also a largely immigrant and increasingly militant working class. Against the economic, political and cultural claims of that class, the Anglo-American bourgeoisie "buckled History around themselves like moral armor." The American past became the exclusive property of a national Protestant elite; its more troublesome contours—from the revolution to the Civil War—were replaced by a seamless reverence for eternal "American values" extolled in the lives of famous men and in the preservation of their houses, graves and war records.

Simultaneously, as Eric Breitbart suggests in "The Painted Mirror," the apparatus of a mass culture was in the making. With the advent of photography in the 1840s and, later, the movies, images vied with words as a medium of truth. In the historical drama, the distinction between fact and fiction disappeared; in the newsreel, the present was turned instantaneously into the past. Elite history could now be transformed into mass fantasy. The classic example of this process was *Birth of a Nation* (1915), in which the slave owners' version of Southern history was pre-

Elizabeth Ewen is the author of Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side *(Monthly Review Press). She teaches at SUNY Old Westbury.*

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sented as a heroic spectacular. (Its white middle-class audiences cheered on the Ku Klux Klan while blacks protested in the streets.) A staple of Hollywood and, later, TV, the historical drama celebrated patriotism, expansionism, individualism.

In a world predicated on mobility, where immigrants, migrants and even the newly arrived suburbanites that Roy Rosenzweig writes about had been cut off from their own cultural resources, the mass media forged a common heritage. For those locked out of political power or stung by the promises of the land of plenty, mass-mediated history constructed a consumer market in images using the American Protestant past as its constant reference point. Historical fiction, the spectacular, the costume drama, the Western, presented a past that few could have participated in but that many could identify with, at least in fantasy. In this process, the mass media served as educator, compensator, friend and family for people caught in the margins between old and new.

In these presentations of the past, history became the static backdrop, the seemingly neutral setting, for the foreground: the personal sphere. In the typical Western, for example, the land that was fought for so bitterly in reality becomes mere landscape. The Indians are inarticulate and expendable, while the cowboy is the mythologically significant subject. In the background, stereotypes of "the other" abound; the foreground is occupied by "romantic," "rugged," "self-reliant" individuals. With a change of scenery, the same basic plot can be transformed into a detective story or a jungle movie. This version of the past teaches a simple lesson: anyone with strength, stamina and determination can escape historical and social circumstances and become successful; history only affects those who cannot help themselves.

In the present period, when what Hans Magnus Enzensberger called the "consciousness industries" are at the height of their power, historical mythmaking has invaded nearly every aspect of American culture, from the White House to the classroom. If the rest of the world is dominated by the legacies of twentieth-century history, the American mass media and political establishment seem bent on shaping an environment in which the escape from history is the most pervasive theme. This tendency includes the depiction of the recent past. Media representations of the 1960s and 1970s consistently avoid any coherent treatment of the social movements and conflicts that shaped those times.

Most of the historians contributing to this book were influenced by the politics of that period, particularly by the links that were forged between social activism and historical consciousness. The last section of *Presenting the Past*, "Politicizing the Past," considers ways of discovering, recording and sustaining an oppositional history. As James Green points out in his essay, "Engaging in People's History," "the roots of people's history lie in the politics of protest." In the 1960s and 1970s, activists felt the need for history in two important areas. The movement against the Vietnam War investigated the long-term patterns of American foreign policy and uncovered a suppressed history of aggression. And the civil rights, women's and gay movements used history to show that racism, sexism and homophobia were not merely forms of personal prejudice but central to the

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evolution of systems of injustice and privilege. In order to penetrate the facade of images, radical history gave voice to those deliberately silenced or only allowed to appear as extras or standard stereotypes in the Hollywood panorama.

Several articles here focus on the importance of history as a form of resistance. Jeffrey C. Stewart and Fath Davis Ruffins's "A Faithful Witness" is an informative look at the evolution of popular forms of black history, largely sustained by the black community, from 1828 to the present. Lisa Duggan, in "History's Gay Ghetto," analyzes the recent flowering of oral history projects in the gay community. Linda Shopes, Jeremy Brecher and James Green write of their own experiences in such projects, in particular of their efforts to create forms which would allow working-class people to become their own historians. Sonya Michel's suggestive essay, "Feminism, Film and Public History," critically evaluates the risks film makers take in putting the past on the silver screen, showing how three feminist documentaries, "Union Maids," "With Babies and Banners" and "The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter," sometimes sacrifice historical complexity for conventional cinematic techniques.

Beyond challenging official academic history and breathing new life into the historical profession, the most important productions of the new history have come from a sense of democratic engagement. Its practitioners have found a rich resource of ethnic diversity and modes of expression that help to shed light on the relationship between social forces and personal experience. By now, there is a small but significant body of books, pamphlets, slideshows, community oral history projects, people's museums and documentaries rooted in these discoveries. Unfortunately, the Reagan years have stalled efforts to continue this work. Although aspects of people's history occasionally grace the movie screens, by and large the image industry is still in control.

Parts one and three of *Presenting the Past* form a dialogue illuminating a central point: history has different meanings depending on who is producing it and for what goals. The second section, "Professionalizing the Past," about the new field of "public history," is more diffuse and, in a sense, diverts attention from the book's more compelling themes. Michael Wallace's "Visiting the Past" presents an incisive account of the Rockefeller restoration of colonial Williamsburg and of Henry Ford's Greenfield Village. Daniel Walkowitz poses important questions about corporate archival history. But the amorphous idea of "public history," which crops up throughout the book, is never clearly defined.

Public history began as a field in the late 1970s when unemployed historians looked for work outside the academy. They found it in a variety of contexts: corporations, historical societies, museums, local government, media and community projects. Out of this emerged a new field replete with its own journals and conferences. This book, in part, is a response to that development. One gets the feeling that the call for articles specifically asked authors to address the topic of public history. Yet the continual reference to it confuses more than it clarifies.

The word "public" is often abused; in a period of intense privatization, its meaning needs serious re-examination. Much of what is described as public history seems to serve private interests, particularly in corporations, corporate-sponsored museums and historical reconstructions. In the Fourth of July promotions around the Statue of Liberty, for example, what separated public history from public relations? What divides public history from mass-mediated versions of the past? Can corporate archival history and community oral history projects be reconciled in the same field? On these matters, *Presenting the Past* is not helpful.

In spite of this, *Presenting the Past* is a valuable resource for people interested in deciphering the anti-historical tendencies of American culture. At a time when historical amnesia is rampant and the popular imagination daily infused with myths, *Presenting the Past* reminds us that the struggle for historical memory is an essential task of cultural and political life. □

More Than Zero

FRED PFEIL

THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE: Tales and Conjurations. *By Charles Johnson. Atheneum. 169 pp. $9.95.*

SUCCESS STORIES. *By Russell Banks. Harper & Row. 183 pp. $15.95.*

"What good are insights? They don't solve anything. They just make things worse." The words come from an interview with the man officially canonized as the current king of short fiction in this country; and the contempt they express toward even the desirability of wisdom has been the dominant attitude in "quality fiction" for some time now.

The result is a slew of work that uses what Fredric Jameson has called "the luxury of the existential" to grovel in rueful helplessness at the way things just somehow are. The form and size of the contemporary short story have been recast by this world view into a kind of recipe: just scatter some slightly sad, slightly twisted salt-and-pepper detail along the faint plot line of an attenuated familial and/or romantic entanglement, employ a suitably flattened narration to run it out to the desired length, and you've got your own, all-new prose "Dover Beach."

Here, though, are two new collections of short fiction that challenge the orthodoxy of insightlessness. The author of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Charles Johnson, is a black writer and an unabashed intellectual. The eight stories in his newest volume continue the project of his previous novels, *Faith and the Good Thing* (1974) and *Oxherding Tale* (1982), which simultaneously plumbed and sent up the philosophical traditions of both East and West as ways of getting at the relationship between being black and Being itself. Accordingly, many of Johnson's protagonists admit to having read some books. What's rarer still, every one of his protagonists, regardless of race, class, gender or even species, knows how to think, and does so, as it were, before our eyes.

Thinking is in fact the main activity in most of these tales. "China" stages a dialectical argument between a slump-shouldered black postman who finds deliverance in the discipline of East-

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ern meditation and martial arts, and his wife, Evelyn, who prefers solid ground, centered identity and the black Christian church. In "The Education of Mingo," a story set in antebellum Southern Illinois, Moses Green's slave Mingo begins chopping up his neighbors, thereby forcing Moses to accept a brutal logic: if slaves are, as Aristotle said, no more than living tools, if Mingo is no more than an extension of Moses, then the murderer is the slaveowner himself. Similarly, what sets "Exchange Value" going is the discovery by two black kids of a dead bag-lady's fortune; but what the story is about is their paralyzing insight into money as what Marx called "the commodity of commodities," a pure abstraction whose power to buy is lost the moment anything is bought.

Such stories are risky, insofar as they locate their characters' identities in the tug and pull of ideas and arguments and offer that play to us as our primary pleasure. All the stories in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* are allegorical, a few ("Menagerie" and the splendid title story, a beautifully told set of reflections on the difficulties of an artist committed to serving the people) quite explicitly so. Yet the risk that we might lose interest, find the play of ideas pretentious or dull, is forestalled by the vigor of Johnson's style:

> Now Moses Green was not a man for doing things halfway. Education, as he dimly understood it, was as serious as a heart attack. You had to have a model, a good Christian gentleman like Moses himself, to wash a Moor white in a single generation. As he taught Mingo farming and table etiquette, ciphering with knotted string, and how to cook ashcakes, Moses constantly revised himself. He tried not to cuss, although any mention of Martin Van Buren or Free-Soilers made his stomach chew itself; or sop cornbread in his coffee; or pick his nose at public markets. Moses, policing all his gestures, standing the boy behind his eyes, even took to drinking gin from a paper sack so Mingo couldn't see it. He felt, late at night, when he looked down at Mingo snoring loudly on his corn-shuck mattress, now like a father, now like an artist fingering something fine and noble from a rude chump of foreign clay.
>
> . . .
>
> How long it took me and Loftis to inventory, then haul Miss Bailey's queer old stuff to our crib, I can't say, but that cranky old ninnyhammer's hoard come to $879,543 in cash money, thirty-two bank books (some deposits be only $5), and me, I wasn't sure I was dreaming or what, but I suddenly flashed on this feeling, once we had left her flat, that all the fears Loftis and me had about the future be gone, 'cause Miss Bailey's property was the past—the power of that fellah Henry Conners trapped like a bottle spirit—which we could live off, so it was future, too, pure potential: can *do*.

I can't say I find all the stories in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* fully successful; there are tales whose plots are allowed to run aground, their dramatic possibilities traded away for philosophical wheelspinning. But even in these pieces the sheer exuberance of the prose kept me moving on. In *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, which opens, appropriately enough, with an epigraph from *The Confidence Man*, Johnson demonstrates more clearly than ever his Melvillean ambition to use narrative to fuse concept and event, politics, philosophy and drama, and to make ideas dance.

No one, on the other hand, will ever accuse Russell Banks of gorgeous writing: his prose has the precise force of a steady, measured outrage. Which is not to say he is not skilled—only that the craft he was honing through the 1970s in *Searching for Survivors* and *Hamilton Stark* has now been placed at the service of a terrible probity.

In his last book, *Continental Drift*, Banks crosscut the story of Bob DuBois, a working-class white man trying to hustle up some luck in Florida, with the tale of Vanise Dorsinville, a Haitian woman trying to get to the United States with only the loa of voodoo for protection. The result was a powerful if not perfect book: at once a celebration of both Vanise's doomed heroism and Bob's pathetically inadequate goodness, and a howl against what the free market system makes out of the world. A similar project is evident in Banks's new collection, *Success Stories*, whose pieces both compose a loose *Bildungsroman* of another New England working-class boy, Earl Painter, and play off the exemplary story of his betrayal and self-betrayal against a group of parabolic tales of power, many of them set in the Third World. The risk taken in *Continental Drift*—that the more distanced Third World drama will not be able to stand up against the power of Banks's more immediate account of what it means to be an American working-class white man—becomes the manifest

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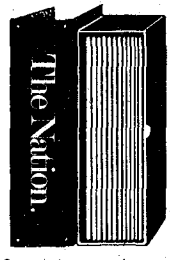

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weakness of *Success Stories*. The problem is not simply that the Third World and/or political fables ("The Fish," "The Gully," "Hostages") are so much thinner than the tale of Earl Painter trying and failing to find the happiness his culture dreams for him, but that the effect of such disproportion is to render the Third World stories little more than allegorical pendants to the "real" story—the story of the white man's life.

Still, that tale, as in *Continental Drift*, is far more than another wallow in the strange sad weirdness of it all. Indeed, from "Queen for a Day" to the closing story, "Firewood," the Painter chronicle is more than worth the price of the book. Banks has put in enough time in working-class America to have an exact sense of what its dreams and betrayals feel like and how they work. What's more, he has constructed a detached narrative style that reminds us of the frightening typicality of Earl Painter's life, and of the lives of those he tries to love. That ability and power are most impressively evident within this collection in "Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story," in which a man who calls himself Ron, but who could just as easily be a grown-up Earl Painter, recounts the story of a brief affair he had with an ugly woman, and finds he can only do so by continually stepping back and starting again:

> I'm still the man in this story, and Sarah is still the woman, but I'm telling it this way because what I have to tell you now confuses me, embarrasses me and makes me sad, and consequently I'm likely to tell it falsely. I'm likely to cover the truth by making Sarah a better woman than she actually was, while making me appear worse than I actually was or am; or else I'll do the opposite, make Sarah worse than she was and me better. The truth is, I was pretty, extremely so, and she was not, extremely so, and I knew it and she knew it. She walked out the door of Osgood's determined to make love to a man much prettier than any she had seen up close before, and I walked out determined to make love to a woman much homelier than I had made love to before. We were, in a sense, equals.
>
> No, that's not exactly true . . .

Just as Charles Johnson's fiction reconnects us to Melville, these relentlessly qualifying, additive sentences take us back to Dreiser in their urge to expose and name the everyday crime. Yet Banks writes with a more merciless exactitude than Dreiser ever had, and with far greater and more self-conscious skill. If American "quality fiction" were to abandon its minimalist chic, its obsession with purely private lives, in favor of some larger and more social quest, these are two writers we would have to thank for their part in the change. □

LETTERS.

(*Continued From Page 194*)

Finally, Chomsky's rendering of the case against Faurisson is incorrect. Initially several groups of anti-racists, survivors and resisters accused Faurisson of "falsification of history." But no court ever "endorsed" or "condemned" him for "falsification of history," as Chomsky claims, because no such law exists. In fact, one of Faurisson's leading supporters, and Chomsky's French publisher, Pierre Guillaume, confirms that he was "never condemned for falsification of history, but for damage to others," i.e., for racial defamation. The decision left all questions of his "conclusions" to the "judgment of the experts." Ironically, the court's refusal to consider such charges has been hailed as a vindication by those, like Guillaume, who deny that the Holocaust took place.

In short, Chomsky continues to defend a no-Holocaust kook and virulent anti-Semite, Robert Faurisson, against a legal doctrine that does not exist, exonerating him of anti-Semitism in the face of overwhelming available evidence to the contrary. He has forgotten a fundamental point of civil libertarianism: no defense of civil liberties demands an abdication of judgment and reason. Voltaire never said, In order to defend you, I give up my responsibility to judge what you say; and to judge you, I shall ignore what you write. *Anson Rabinbach*

The editors regret the error in Anson Rabinbach's letter of May 17.

CORRECTION

Two drawings by Isadore Seltzer in last week's issue were misplaced. The one on page 169 should have been on page 175, and vice versa. Our apologies.

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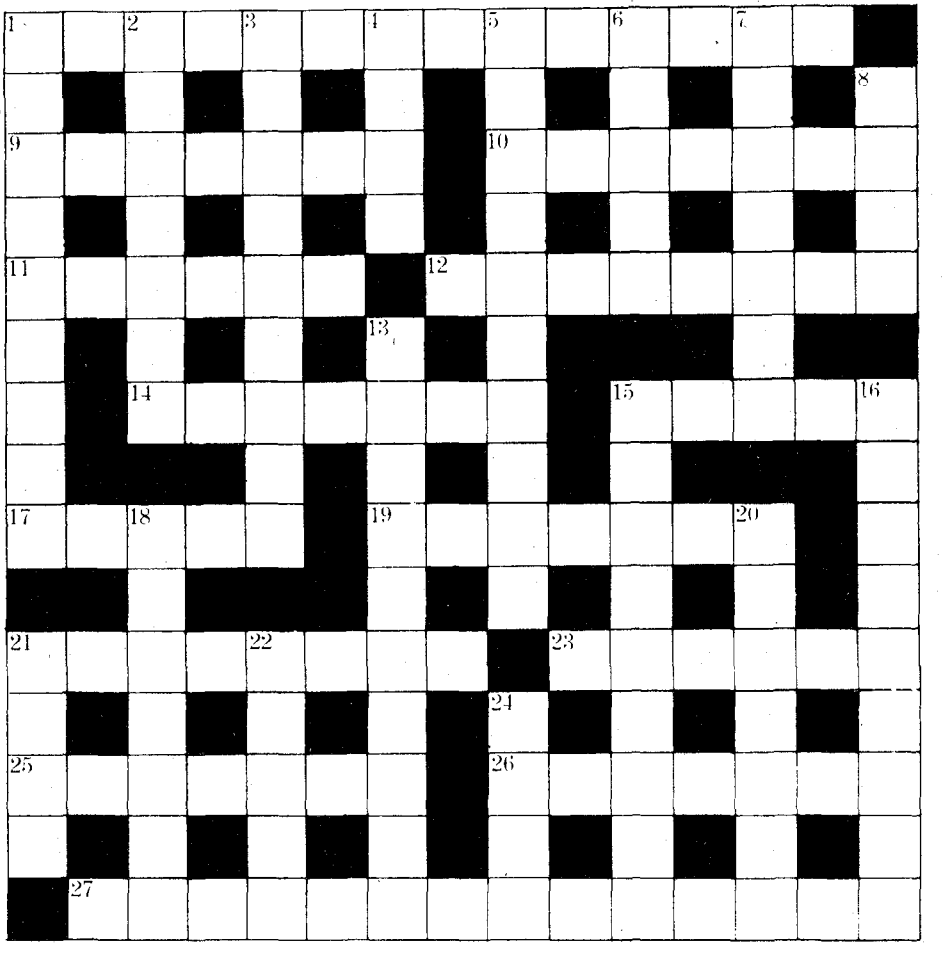
A	■	L	■	A	■	E	■	C	■	U	■	X	■	A
R	O	A	S	T	■	F	R	A	N	S	H	A	L	S
B	■	L	■	T	■	U	■	N	■	S	■	C	■	Y
O	N	A	G	E	R	S	■	C	H	A	O	T	I	C
N	■	M	■	R	■	A	■	E	■	R	■	■	■	O
■	W	E	A	S	E	L	■	R	O	S	T	R	U	M
M	■	I	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	A	■	E
O	M	N	I	B	U	S	■	T	R	A	M	P	S	■
N	■	■	■	E	■	K	■	H	■	D	■	I	■	E
O	S	M	A	N	L	I	■	E	C	H	I	D	N	A
X	■	U	■	Z	■	M	■	C	■	E	■	F	■	S
I	L	L	T	E	M	P	E	R	■	R	A	I	N	Y
D	■	E	■	N	■	Y	■	A	■	E	■	R	■	G
E	A	S	T	E	R	■	A	B	E	D	N	E	G	O

Crossword Puzzle No. 2116

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 One to whom what might be the last working day became important. (8,6)
9 Automobile not here? (Herb seems to imply it.) (7)
10 Obviously not "Magic Mountain" handled by such a broker. (7)
11 Possibly a bad road, but not going out, as one might decree. (6)
12 A baseball team where Mary's charges ought to be placed? (Times like this might mean quite a lot.) (8)
14 and 23 Suffer what you have to, but bring a trained sort! (4,3,4,2)
15 Lead? Certainly not! (The next rain will certainly have it.) (5)
17 Probably part of anyone's language. (Can't make it without the apostrophe? (5)
19 Watery? (7)
21 The nationality of such as Horatio and Fleming? (8)
23 See 14.
25 A strong point, but it implies fighting in wholesale proportions. (7)
26 —from a lending library, no doubt! (7)
27 What one has, if an obsessive hunter? (Trouble, continually trouble!) (4,2,4,4)

DOWN

1 See 22.
2 Perhaps both a sitter and a setter—especially the latter. (4,3)
3 The sign might prove a nuisance while standing in front of the barber shop, but the customer likes to see it. (2,7)
4 Is the animal in a state? On the contrary, it might be ornamental. (4)
5 A stretcher case might be so completed. (7,3)
6 Order, in a sense—like in an instrument of the twenties, perhaps. (5)
7 Certainly not the incoming mail, in place of the legionnaire. (7)
8 Such a fellow should be sharp as a tack! (4)
13 Jocularly, you might hear of a slipper on one. (Sounds like a close relative of a comic, if a top one.) (6,4)
15 It might imply something confidential in Paris, as shown by the rune stone, perhaps. (5,4)
16 Taken off, or put inside a completed chess game. (9)
18 With the right type, or possibly just the obtuse kind? (7)
20 Heart-sick in return? (Sounds good, coming from him.) (7)
21 Babe, how someone like Liszt has changed you! (4)
22 and 1 down Old-fashioned books of tables for those who are quick to have an opinion? (5,9)
24 Bone of contention? (Don't make light of it!) (4)

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